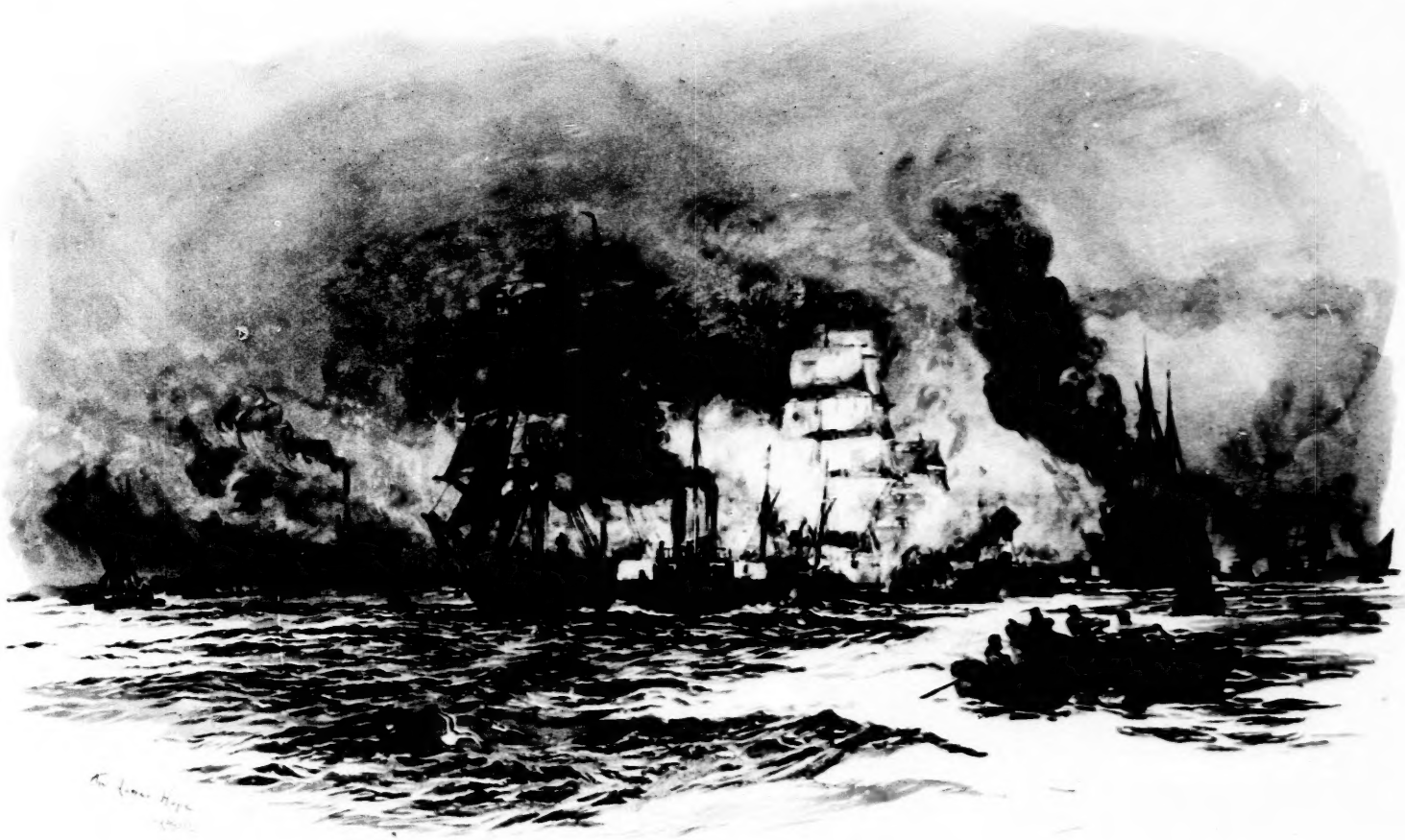
THE TIDAL THAMES.



The Lower Hope.

TIDAL THAMES

WITH

TWENTY FULL-PAGE PHOTOGRAVURE PLATES

Printed on India paper, and other Illustrations, after Original Drawings,

BY

W. L. WYLLIE, A.R.A.

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BY

GRANT ALLEN.

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A FAIR WIND.

THE TIDAL THAMES.

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

TO the minds of most Englishmen, perhaps even of most Londoners—at least, among those who live in the greater London "above bridge"—the mere name of the Thames brings up instinctively the mental picture, not of a vast commercial highway, but of a peaceful and placid rural river—a river that runs in quiet channels by locks and lashers through the midst of a fertile valley composed of lush green water-meadows, and ridged round in the distance by shady beechen hangers, that cling in long lines to the gentle slopes of undulating chalk downs or the rounded sides of smooth and isolated sandstone hills. The first images that rise at once before our mental vision at the sound of the word are those of Nuneham, with its breadth of oaken shade and its pretty rustic wood-work bridges; of Pangbourne, with its autumn-tinted trees and its foaming weirs of snow-white water; of Whitchurch, with its picturesque mill and its quaintly graceful elm-embowered steeple; of Sonning, with its over-arching avenues and its tangled banks of reeds and sedges; of Henley, with its leafy eyot and its tall fringe of closely

serried poplars; of the ruinous ivy-clad towers of Medmenham, the heavy water-front of smiling Eton, the rich woods of ducal Cleveden, the huge keep of royal Windsor, silhouetted against the warm evening sky from among the purple loosestrifes and green rushes of Romney Lock. This is the Thames of the ordinary English summer tourist: the Thames on whose silver windings we look down with delight from the outer edge of the terrace at Richmond: the Thames that Denham apostrophised in his famous iambics from Cooper's Hill: the Thames that Spenser bade run softly past the red-brick water-front of the Elizabethan Temple till he should end his sweetest and purest marriage song.

But there is a second and far other Thames, less outwardly attractive at first sight in its natural external lineaments than this placid rural stream, yet rich in many human elements of the most picturesque and vivid character—the tidal river that spreads its long reaches in monotonous yet ever-varied succession from the busy piers of London Bridge to the North Foreland and the open sea. And this is also, in more than one other sense, the very truest and most genuine Thames of all. This is the actual Thames of history and of commerce: the Tamesis on whose upper navigable stretches the Romans built the mercantile capital of their Britannic province: the Thames by whose mouth the traffic of the entire world pours to-day towards the wealthy metropolis of modern England. This is the Thames which has made London; it would perhaps hardly be too much to say, which has made all commercial Britain, viewed as the chief trading centre and entrepôt of the civilised and mercantile world. We shall have so much to say and to see in this volume of the ships and steamers which flow in and out perpetually to or from the Port of London, that a few words, by way of introduction, as to the origin and reason of this nautical pre-eminence of the chief English river may not be out of place here, by way of preface to our journey up the great navigable highway, from its open seaward mouth to its highest tidal levels.

Rising among the broken oolitic uplands of the Cotswold Hills, which form the backbone and main dividing-ridge of South-western Britain, the youthful Thames, instead of turning westward towards the open Atlantic, like its now distanced sister and rival, the Severn, trends in a general

easterly direction, down the slow slopes, towards the German Ocean and the European continent. Passing gently through the level lowlands of Gloucestershire and Oxfordshire, it meets and cuts its way through the high central chalk range between Wallingford and Reading, and gives rise as it passes to its most romantic inland scenery in the wooded gorge by Goring and Mapledurham. At last it emerges into the low-lying London basin, as it leaves the flanks of the chalky Chilterns in the rear; and here, flowing through the centre of a saucer-shaped depression, formed by a bend in the tertiary strata which compose its lower valley, it soon reaches nearly to sea-level, and becomes a sluggish, tawny, tidal stream from Teddington onward. Into no other river of Europe does the tide penetrate for so long a distance. It is the size and direction of the Thames, combined with the peculiar position of the British Islands on the face of the globe, that has turned it into the great central water-way of modern Britain. There are only five large navigable rivers of the first importance in our island, and each of those five has given rise to a port and a traffic of a size strictly commensurate with its value as a highway at each particular moment of the world's history. The Clyde has produced Glasgow; the Mersey, Liverpool; the Severn, Bristol; the Humber, Hull; and the Thames, London.

A moment's consideration will show us at once why these things are so. London owes its existing greatness partly to incontestable natural advantages; partly to historic prescription and past exclusive conditions, now found almost equally well elsewhere. If England had to begin life over again at the present day, it is possible that Liverpool or Glasgow, pointing as they do outward towards the Atlantic and the American, Australian, and Asiatic worlds, might, perhaps, outrun London in the race for population, wealth, and trade. But London and the Thames had so many centuries' start over the modern cities on the Clyde and the Mersey, that a vast population had already settled by the pool of the Tower while they were still mere obscure Scottish or Lancastrian villages; and a centralised system of roads, railways, government, and society had so rooted itself around the marshes of the London region, that any idea of supercession became at last practically impossible. In early times, and during the Middle Ages, the Clyde and the Mersey were useless as havens; situated in the midst

of rough hilly districts, they looked westward towards the pathless Atlantic, not eastward towards the then civilised world; and their open mouths were too exposed to storms and ocean swells to afford safe anchorage for the small coasting craft of ancient navigation. It was not till after the discovery of America, and the opening of the Cape route to India, that Liverpool and Glasgow began to grow great. Even Bristol, though it formed the chief port of the rich Severn valley, and could trade a little with Ireland and Bordeaux, never rose into any high importance till West Indian sugar and Guinea slaves began to afford ample employment for its nascent shipping interest. As to Hull, it lay too far north, remote from the busy life of the southern counties, then the most civilised and prosperous portion of all England; while even to the present day its trade turns almost entirely towards Scandinavia and the Baltic, once only the happy hunting-grounds of bare-legged Danish and Norwegian pirates. But the Thames, besides being the deepest and safest estuary and river in the length and breadth of England, looked due east towards the Continent and the flourishing trading towns of Flanders and the Low Countries; and its chief port lay far in the heart of the country, safe from the attacks of Vikings or invaders, and in a convenient position for the distribution of goods, as well as at the centre of a large and fruitful agricultural region. All these things marked out the Thames from the very beginning as the natural highway of British commerce, and London as the natural and inevitable emporium of the Thames shippers.

Long before the Roman days, no doubt, the Gaulish merchants who trafficked with the semi-civilised natives belonging to the agricultural tribes in Kent and Essex must have brought their beads, and cloth, and bronze-ware up the Thames in rude sailing vessels to that primeval London—"the hill by the pool," as the name means, being interpreted, in the Celtic language; and there must have bartered them in open palaver with Trinobantes or Cantii, much as Arab or Portuguese merchants barter their wares nowadays with negro tribes beside the Gambia, the Congo, or the Zambesi. But it was the Romans who built the first considerable town of London, on the pool near the Tower Hill and St. Paul's, and who first turned the trade of a civilised England into the broad channel of the

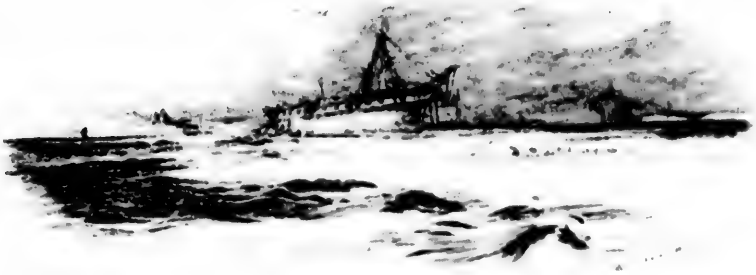
tidal Thames. From their time onward, the traffic of the Thames has gone on growing and widening from age to age, without a single check or interval. Even the heathen Saxon conquest did not interfere with the commerce of the great river, for shortly after the Teutonic settlement in Britain, the Venerable Bede speaks of London as already "the mart of many nations, who resort to it by sea and land." Throughout the Saxon period it remained the commercial capital of all England, though the royal city of the West Saxon kings was Winchester; and not only French and Flemish merchants sailed up the Thames, but also "the men of the Emperor came in their own ships," and towards the close of the period the Esterlings from the Baltic frequented the port, and introduced their own famous "Esterling" or "Sterling" weights and measures. During the whole of the Middle Ages the trade of Flanders and Guienne centred upon London, and the city grew greatly, first under the early Plantagenets, and then still more under the liberal and commercially-minded Yorkist kings.

The great mercantile revolution which followed on the voyages of Columbus and Vasco di Gama completed the maritime supremacy of the Thames and of England. The Atlantic ports quickly drew to themselves all the Oriental trade that had hitherto formed the exclusive monopoly of Venice, Genoa, and the Italian republics, while the newly-found commerce with America gradually fixed its principal home in English harbours. In our own time navigation has once more widened its bounds; as it leapt in the seventeenth century from the Mediterranean and the narrow seas to the broad Atlantic basin, so now it has leapt from the Atlantic basin further to embrace the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, and the China seas. Not India and America alone, but Africa, Australia, Polynesia, and the far East, have all entered into the widening cycle of European commerce. These changes have each in its own way tended still further to develop the trade of Britain, which happens to occupy the exact central position in the hemisphere of greatest land; so that London and Liverpool are nearer to every port on earth, taken together, than any other ports in the entire world can possibly be. Owing to this fact, joined with the insular position of Britain, its large extent of sea-board, its numerous harbours, and its great facilities for ship-building, as well as its coal, its iron, its industrial population, and its old

commercial or maritime instincts, England has amply kept up her ancient position as the chief merchant commonwealth of the entire world. And though the westward turn given to her commerce by the Atlantic navigation has diverted much trade from London, and has raised Glasgow and Liverpool to the second place in wealth and population among British towns, yet the natural advantages of the Thames, as well as the artificial advantages derived from its position as seat of government and centre of society, have preserved for London the first rank in commerce and shipping, and by far the first in size and importance. It was not without true wit and wisdom that a refractory Lord Mayor answered King James's threat to remove the Court to Oxford by the famous mock-modest retort, "May it please your Majesty not to take away the Thames also!"

The traffic that thus sets steadily with every returning tide up the mouth of the great river towards the Port of London has its picturesque as well as its mercantile and material aspect. The tidal Thames is the most wonderful embodiment on earth of the eternal seafaring drama; it is the epitome of everything that can be seen or pictured in the life of them that go down to the great deep in ships. The lower reaches of the river have none of that sylvan or rural beauty which marks the whole course of the Thames before it develops into a main highway of the scattered nations at London Bridge. The shores of Kent and Essex are for the most part flat and marshy, or where they rise into downs and ridges are too distant from the chief central channel to loom up in any largeness of outline or distinctness of elevation, as seen from the frequented maritime track. "Dismally ugly, dull, and monotonous" is generally the immediate verdict of the impartial foreigner who makes his first acquaintance with the aspect of Britain from the deck of a steamer upward bound. And yet, to those who have the eye for seeing it, there is really a marvellous wealth of picturesqueness and beauty on the tawny turbid bosom of the great and thickly-peopled English estuary. In every part the water is alive with boats and vessels of every kind: dusky barges, with great russet-red sails, tacking across the narrow reaches; light shrimpers, with their nets dragging loosely behind, and their men and boys all eagerly plying their task in the open channel; huge ocean-going steamers, hurrying up under all steam to make the Port

of London before the shades of evening; white-sailed yachts, with idle occupants lolling luxuriously on their spotless decks, and watching lazily the busy scene that flits fantastically before them; and clumsy-looking billy-boys, the very ideal of utter awkwardness in the build of a ship, yet admirably adapted for performing the one particular piece of special work for which they are designed by the practical intelligence of their cunning builders. Then there is the collateral interest derived from the land-marks and sea-marks of the best-navigated stretch of water in the whole world—the great red lightships, the tall gaunt beacons, the parti-coloured buoys, the training-ships moored by the shore, the long level expanses of shining grey mud, the black wrecks, grown green with hanging tresses of slimy sea-weed, that show their high prows and battered figure-heads above the silvery line of dry sands at low water. All these things, though passed by unobserved of the casual tourist who steams down the Lower Thames on a gay packet-boat for Antwerp or Ostend, are subjects on which the seeker after the picturesque loves to linger for a while, and which the artist loves to seize as they show themselves, for a moment, temptingly before him in all their wonderful richness of native colouring. In the matter of colour, indeed, there is probably nothing on earth that gives us so much variety and intensity of hue as the Lower Thames. And whoever wants to see and understand the great river thus at its best, in its own peculiar moods and dull leaden harmonies, enlivened by its rust-red sails and purple lights and crimson beacons, should cruise and beat about its mouth with us for a week or two of sunny or squally autumn weather in a small yacht or sailing vessel. The careless glee of the sea will soon overcome him. In ten days or a fortnight he will have learned to love the river, and all that belongs to it, with a yachtsman's affection, and at the end of that time will return home to his London quarters, invigorated by sea-breezes and the delights of roughing it, if not a wiser, at least by far a browner man.



THE GOODWIN SANDS

CHAPTER II

THE NORTH FORELAND AND THE OPEN MOUTH

THE neat little centreboard yawl *Puffin*, of seventeen tons burden, on whose deck we start to make our voyage up the yawning estuary of the Thames from its mouth to London Bridge, with continual diversions into creeks and swatch-ways on either side, is as quaint and odd-looking a small craft as you would wish to see on any English tidal waters. She ranks as a yacht by courtesy only; that is to say, there is no other category under which you could possibly place her, and that one will answer at least as well as any imaginable or imaginary alternative. Her owner and skipper christened her the *Puffin* because of her curiously stable build and very remarkable breadth of beam. She draws no more than three feet of water at a pinch, which enables her to go anywhere that a man can wade with his breeches off without wetting his shirt; so she makes a capital boat for sketching and painting in, as you can put her alongside a wreck or a beacon, or run into a shallow creek at low water without any reference to the state of the tide or the probable depth of the navigable channel. If she grounds, it doesn't at all matter, as she sits bolt upright with commendable stability on the muddy bottom, and when the tide comes up again she merely bumps once or twice before righting herself, and then gets afloat once more as taut as ever. She has admirable sea-going qualities, too, and

The Downs.

has lived through more than one ugly little episode of nasty weather that drove a good many bare-ribbed wrecks on to the wide engulfing sands of the Kentish Knocks, or buried them deep in the hungry shoals of the devouring Goodwins.

The accommodation on board the *Puffin*, though excellent of its kind, is limited in quantity, and by no means unduly luxurious in quality. We carry a crew of three hands, all told: one of them being the owner and skipper; one a friend and brother artist with a keen eye to the jib-sheet and an innate genius for the manufacture of savoury stew; while the third and last is a mere uninitiated landsman and passenger, with a chart and a note-book instead of an easel, and a stylographic pen instead of a paint-brush. In the tiny cabin there is just room enough for a few wooden bunks, with their appropriate rugs and blankets, together with a small open stove for the due production of the savoury stews aforesaid. The lockers contain a sufficient store of fresh bread, bacon, tinned meats, and other simple necessaries for a few weeks' cruise; while for interesting literature, have we not the Sailing Directions issued by authority of the Honourable Brethren of the Trinity House, and the charts of the Thames constructed from the very latest surveys of Her Majesty's Board of Admiralty? Our deck is just big enough for us to get about upon, with the dingey turned bottom up occupying the middle. Under these circumstances, one has to live almost entirely out-doors for weeks and weeks together; and if the spray is sometimes rather moist, and the fog rather thick, and the early morning air rather chilly, and heaving seas rather aggressive on the hastily-swallowed breakfast, yet the good dose of fresh air, the delicious salty feeling of the breeze, and the perpetual sense of ease and lightness which seems inseparable from a sea voyage, are more than enough fully to atone for these and even greater passing inconveniences.

The right way to see the Tidal Thames, from the point of view of its delineation as a great maritime highway and international commercial track, is clearly by the route we propose to adopt: of sailing against the course of the stream, from its mouth upward. In this way we meet the various single threads of the great converging stream first in their separate isolation as they come to us from the sea homewards—catching the different lines

that run together from the German Ocean, and the Flemish harbours, and the English Channel—and follow them up as they all draw closer and closer to one another, till they merge at last into one in the narrowing funnel-shaped course above the Nore and the Sea Reach, just below Gravesend. That is the best plan for letting the drama of the Thames unfold itself naturally and spontaneously before you; for though from the geographical point of view the river runs from London to the North Foreland, from the practical and nautical point of view it runs from the North Foreland up to London; and London itself is the true focus and final haven towards which all its teeming life and vivid shipping is for ever hastily tending.

We set out, then, on our upward course from Ramsgate Harbour on a fresh breezy August morning, when the mackerel fleet is enlivening the busy port with its endless series of active luggers from all parts of the English Channel. Tubby Hastings boats lie here, gaily painted with all the various colours of the rainbow; larger vessels stand over there from Shoreham, side by side with long and graceful craft that hail from Penzance and Mount's Bay, kept neat as a new pin by their Cornish owners, and contrasting well in this respect with the bulky yawls from Boulogne opposite, crammed to the full on their noisy decks with gesticulating Frenchmen. Tremendous fishing-boats, indeed, these last, with heavy gear as if to match, and steam capstan to heave it up in due process. Mackerel, in fact, are perhaps the most elusively migratory of all our common British fishes, appearing and disappearing again in the most fantastical and apparently meaningless manner. The truth is, the mackerel is a predatory animal, which follows the herring kind in its annual migrations, and takes heavy toll of its young, the brit; and so the appearance of the mackerel shoals depends largely upon the movements of these herring themselves, as well as of the sprats, rock-ling, and other fishes upon which also the mackerel prey. The railway companies run express trains to London direct on the days of good mackerel catches, and as many as 300,000 fish have sometimes been netted in a single night by one fleet.

Ramsgate harbour, whose stone piers and heavy tower-like lighthouse we leave behind us, receding dimly as we make out seaward, stands opposite a gap or "gate" in the white chalk cliffs of Thanet, which gives its name

to the old tangled fisher village by the port and the gleaming modern London watering-place that has grown up irregularly round that ancient crowded nucleus. Ruim was the earliest British name of the Isle of Thanet, and Ruim's Gate, or Ramsgate, was the main opening in the long line of natural barriers which guarded the Kentish coasts from the onslaughts of the sea in this its most exposed and wind-beaten corner. The twin stone

RAMSGATE HARBOUR.

piers—Smeaton's masterpiece of harbour architecture—enclose a space in which four hundred sail can lie with safety, and in rough weather this haven of refuge is often crowded with fugitives from the Downs or ships towed in after being stranded on the fatal Goodwins. The obelisk on the quay, which obtrudes itself so unnecessarily in the midst of an otherwise harmonious scene, fitly commemorates the departure of his late sacred Majesty King George IV. on a certain unimportant occasion, from this port for Hanover. As we run out to sea, the tall cliffs on either side open more widely each moment astern, and the well-known sea-marks rise one after another gradually before our eyes,—the familiar lighthouse on the

western pierhead, Jacob's Ladder (that quaint and quaintly named stone staircase cut in the perpendicular face of the cliff), the red ball on the summit of the sloping chalk-down beyond it, St. Lawrence's Church, the three windmills, Pugin's Tower, the sweeping outlines of the opposite crescent, and, last of all, the white mass of West Cliff Lodge dimly rising in the middle distance southward. Then, as we pass out between the Dyke and Quern (there is nothing more strangely redolent of the sea and seafaring ways than these odd immemorial names of maritime lanes and highways), the low flat outline of Pegwell Bay expands itself slowly behind us on the left, while to the right the white lines of cliff stretch onwards boldly in long succession past Broadstairs pier and beacon to the tall white lighthouse that stands up gaunt against the grey sky on the North Foreland. And so, with the land growing ever dimmer and dimmer behind us, the *Puffin* runs gaily before the wind, lurching and tumbling over the heavy swell which rolls in from the German Ocean, as we push out bravely across the open sea for the misty purlieus of the distant Goodwins.

"A very dangerous flat and fatal," says Salarino in the *Merchant of Venice*, "where the carcases of many a tall ship lie buried"; and indeed, though of course the Goodwins cannot be, strictly speaking, considered as any part of the Tidal Thames, even in the widest acceptation of the phrase, yet their position at the very entrance of the great river road to London and their fatal connection with the mouth of the Thames, seems to mark them out as the natural commencement of a strolling pictorial upward cruise. To miss the famous shoal is to miss much of what is most picturesque and characteristic in the whole outer Thames highway. So on we go for the ill-famed sandbank.

The Foreland is almost lost to sight now in the faint haze, and we are still struggling over the tumultuous rollers of the German Ocean. We ought surely to sight the light-vessel off the North Sands Head by this time. Something looms up dimly before us, to be sure, but it seems a trifle too dark in colour, and not quite the right shape either, for the light-ship. Take a good look at it now, ahead there, as we rise on the top of the next roller. It turns out to be a stranded brigantine, and there is some other object moving dimly on the waves alongside. Yonder is the

light-vessel more to the right; this is a collier, and she must be aground on the Knoll, while those are Deal luggers close alongside, stripping all that is left of her out of water. As we get nearer we can see the Deal boatmen climbing about the unfortunate vessel, cutting all the running rigging, and unbending the sails from the poor wreck; and before

A WRECK ON THE GOODWIN KNOLL.

we are well out of sight of her again, she lies there upon the great sand-bank, nothing more than a bare skeleton.

Off to the southward now, and away at once for the white line of foam that marks the Goodwins, leaving the great red swinging light-vessel that heaves and tosses on the swell, sounding its ominous gong perpetually in foggy or hazy weather to warn ships of their dangerous neighbourhood to the North Sand Head. The sands lie high and dry at low water, but they are very steep-to on their eastern side. We can therefore anchor just outside the snowy line of curved breakers, lashed into endless turmoil by the strong tide which rushes between the patches of tawny sand, and go

ashore in the dingey on the actual bank, choosing for the purpose a sort of vague inlet where the surf is less boisterous, and landing easier. So, encasing ourselves in india-rubber boots of capacious size, we run boldly upon the yellow shoal, and hauling up our boat by the shelving edge we take a turn along the ribbed sands covered with dead shells and mouldering jelly-fish, between the two angry lines of breakers that roll and roar unceasingly on either hand. The bank itself is firm and solid under foot, save in a few doubtful hollows and bottoms reputed to be quicksands and shining like inland lakes or ponds among the drier ridges; yet there is something weird and almost ghastly in the sense of thus walking on the dry sea-bottom; and when the tide rolls gradually in upon us, and we seem to be standing alone in the very midst of the tempestuous sea, a sense of solemn loneliness steals upon one, and we are not sorry to face the angry surf once more, on our way back to the safe and solid deck of the little *Puffin*.

The Goodwins stretch for some nine miles parallel with the coast from the North to the South Foreland. A navigable breach known as the Swash (a common nautical name for such back alleys of navigation) used once to cut them into two nearly equal parts, the North Calipur and the South Calipur; but this disused old channel is now practically silted up. Though they are completely covered at high water, they are yet something more than mere sandbanks, for they rest upon a firm basis of blue clay, and a bank of solid chalk rises boldly from the sea-bottom near the North Goodwin even to this day. Tradition has it, of course, that the sands occupy the place of an ancient island where the great Earl Godwin had his Kentish castle in the days before the Norman conquest, and a varying legend connects their origin with the steeple of Tenterden Church in the Kentish Weald by asserting that the materials from which the tower was built had been collected for the purpose of strengthening the sea wall of the Goodwins, then a component part of the English mainland; and that owing to the evil act of the Abbot of St. Augustine's, who diverted the stone from its original object, the next great storm submerged the whole exposed district as far as Sandwich. Similar legends of a submergence due to human carelessness or greed are told of the Land of Lyonesse in Cornwall,

and of the Lowland Hundred in Cardigan Bay. It is highly probable, indeed, that the sands are really the last remnant of a crumbling island, long since swept away by the devouring waves; but both the stories which account for its destruction are certainly dated "an age too late." Though a Lowland Hundred may once have stood upon this spot and been slowly wasted away piecemeal, just as Sheppey is now being wasted before our very eyes by the land-springs and the tides, it is in the highest degree unlikely that any part of it lasted to at all so recent times as those of Earl Godwin or of Tenterden steeple. The Goodwins, indeed, may boast of a far more respectable and even romantic antiquity than those few short historical centuries. They form a last remnant, no doubt, of that great belt of land which once connected the Kentish coast with the opposite shores of Flanders or of Picardy, and whose memory is still kept up for us by the twin answering cliffs of Dover and Folkestone on the one hand, and of Capes Blancnez and Grisnez on the other. It was over that broad connecting isthmus—a wide natural bridge of solid chalk, at the very spot whence the much-debated Channel Tunnel is now projected—that the wild animals of Britain made their way from the Continent into our then peninsular area, after the close of the last great glacial epoch, when all England lay as closely covered with huge masses of sheet ice as Greenland lies at the present day; and it is to the former existence of such a land connection that our islands owe their possession of the red deer, the fox, the badger, the hare, the rabbit, the otter, and all our other indigenous mammals, not to mention the wild boars, white cattle, brown bears, wolves, and beavers, which have only become extinct within the quite historical period. As a last relic of that ancient and memorable bond of union between Britain and the European mainland, we may look upon the low wreck-strewn and storm-beaten sandbanks of the Goodwins with a certain melancholy and regretful respect.

We get under way now once more and run again to the southward, skirting the eastern edge of the sands, which narrow more and more as they verge toward the direction of the French coast. A big timber vessel with painted ports and coppered bottom lies high on the ridge as we pass by, only her foremast still standing; and here again are the Deal men

with their luggers, busily getting out the cargo of timber. Outside us looms another light-vessel on the East Goodwin, with a triangle at the mast-head instead of the ordinary red ball. At the south-western point of the South Sands Head stands yet a third light-vessel, bearing the name of the shoal on which she is moored; and as we are nearing her we venture to cross the strip of white water whirling and seething angrily with the tide, though some ugly stumps of timber show us as we go where the green bones of some big ship lie. Soon we are in calm water once more, standing in for the security of the Downs. This is reputed the greatest natural harbour of refuge in the whole world, the Goodwins making a sort of break-water from the easterly or north-easterly gales; and here, in stormy weather from the westward, may be seen congregated perhaps a larger number of sailing vessels of all sorts than in any other similar anchorage in any part of the navigable seas. Large ships moor outside the Brake so as to be able to run round through the Gull Stream into Margate Roads in case of heavy weather from the southward. Vessels of lesser burden anchor inside the South Brake in what is called the Small Downs, and masters are warned to take the bearing of the Rattler buoy before dark in strong southerly gales, so that in case of need they may slip and run up the narrow channel inside the Brake to Ramsgate. A mudbank has been left there on purpose for them to run on under full sail; and as in such cases the poor refugee has generally lost both his anchors, this mudbank is a rather convenient substitute for artificial moorings. To-day the Downs are quiet as need be; the ships waiting for a shift of wind lie still, with the long Deal galleys slipping about among them, landing pilots from passing steamers or bringing off hasty letters for the shore; and the light wind carries out with it to sea all the sounds and smells of the long line towards Walmer and Deal, where the big luggers are drawn up high on the beach, ready to supply anchors and chains to drifting ships or take the crews off stranded or sunken wrecks in the next gale. Then, indeed, the aspect of the roads will be very different. A seething sea of foam will occupy the whole space, the vessels will be almost hidden in the driving spray and mist, and will slowly drag or break away from their anchors, going foul of one another and sinking to the bottom in wild confusion. In these cases

The Shivering Sand Bell Buoy.

the brave qualities of the Deal sailors come out strong, though every lugger is said to have a lawyer of its own up in London, who puts the machinery of the courts to work at once the moment any dispute about the matter of salvage arises with the owners.

Vessels bringing up on the Small Downs take the precaution to grease well the flukes of their anchors; for otherwise, if they once start, they will not bite again, and you drive helplessly before the gale, Heaven only knows whither. The Brake, a long narrow sand carefully marked with distinctive buoys, runs parallel to the shore, like the Goodwins, and between them lies the Gull Stream, one of the main navigable roads to northward.

THE GULL STREAM.

A light-ship, with the usual great red ball at the mast-head, rides here in eight fathoms, and a black buoy warns vessels off the steep promontory of Bunt Head, a dangerous projecting ridge of the fateful Goodwins.

North of these comes a little archipelago of sandy patches, composed of minor islands of shoal scattered about over the face of the sea, with each its distinctive buoy to mark it as dangerous. The Gull has its black and white chequers, the North Bar has red and white, and each of the others varies the colour or arrangement in some minor detail so as to form a connected series of distinct marks.

Hauling the foresail now to windward, and lashing the helm down, we proceed at once to the discussion of dinner, a meal which is produced and consumed on board the *Puffin* with truly primitive and delightful simplicity. A marine painter's yacht, indeed, may be regarded as a sort of judicious mixture of Milton's Paradise (unhappily without the part of Eve) and a pure ideal republican communism. All men here are free and equal. One of the

party prepares and cooks the savoury stew at the tiny stove in the small forecastle, and then he serves it out, smoking hot, in three capacious soup plates to the other two, told off to work the ship on the wee wet deck across the rolling waves. What delicious appetising stew it is too! redolent of poetical perfumes and dainty flavours, impossible to associate with such mere earthly materials as cold leg of mutton, carrots and turnips, from which, nevertheless, the evidence of our senses compels us to believe it has really been compounded. On land, the thing would be absolutely inconceivable, but at sea, the epicure fears to attempt in fitting language the surpassing excellence of that indescribable hash, lest he should be accused at once of exaggeration and of unseemly attention to the good things of this earth. Can it be merely the effect of the sea air alone, one is tempted to wonder, or is it that our amateur cook is really a marvellous master of his chosen craft? A little of both, no doubt, for the best of all possible cooks is certainly the educated and cultivated cook who cooks *con amore*; but the invigorating sea breezes, too, cannot possibly count for nothing. A good slice of bread and real home-made plum jam does duty instead of pastry or dessert; and with that simple finishing-touch our first dinner aboard is fully completed. Then we turn to with a bit of crumb to wipe out each man his own soup-plate—communism rather than Paradise, this—and to replace it carefully in its proper position on the rim of wood above the lockers, for all things here, in accordance with the apostle's advice, are done decently and in order; indeed, on a small ship, as on a big one, space is so valuable and tidiness so necessary (since you must always know exactly where to lay your hand on everything the very moment you require it) that all dishes, ropes, spars, and properties generally must needs be put back in their familiar places as soon as ever they are actually done with for the time being. As we sit on our open deck, like kings together (Homeric, of course), cleaning our own knives and spoons in decent fashion with a scrap of newspaper, a graceful schooner dashes hastily past us with a party of ladies wrapped up in rugs on her spotless decks, while a French cook—yes, actually a regular cook in square white cap and stainless apron—lounges at his ease, reading an illustrated journal on an easy chair in the fo'c's'le. And they call that yachting! The mutual contempt of ourselves and the

French cook, as we gaze scornfully from our coigns of vantage at one another, is simply and utterly indescribable.

Off again, now dinner's finished, and away toward Margate, past the threatening chalky bluffs of the North Foreland! What a solid mass of weather-beaten rock it looks, defying the waves with its outpost of chalk, a sentinel standing on the extreme verge of Britain to warn the sea against any further angry encroachments on the soil of England. And yet the sea encroaches still, for all that, slowly beating down the whole cliff-wall of the Isle of Thanet, whose hardest projecting barrier here juts out boldly into the open face of the German Ocean. The North Foreland stands like the front door, in fact, of the tidal Thames; and by Act of Parliament the Port of London extends right down from London Bridge to a line drawn four miles to seaward of this easternmost Kentish promontory. Once round its point, therefore, you feel yourself [illegible] out of the high seas and well into the mouth of the river [illegible] its summit fitly rises a tall octagonal lighthouse to guide you [illegible] with a lantern visible a distance of nineteen miles off in every direction. The light is fixed, not revolving, but it has a red ray, and it occupies the place of an immemorial wooden beacon, which long stood on this "Cantium Promontorium," and was burnt down by accident towards the end of the seventeenth century.

A long afternoon, beating slowly against the wind and tide, leads us gradually on past Whiteness, Foreness, and the projecting fangs of the Long Nose, till at length we come abreast of the coast-guard station and see Margate jetty itself standing up in front of us in full profile against the round red evening sun. Turning the corner of the jetty, we fetch round the pier and make fast to the great iron ring of a mooring buoy in the secure retreat of Margate harbour, whose waters soon after ebb away, leaving us at peace in the soft mud of that ancient haven. To the uninstructed eye of the mere landsman, Margate probably appears nothing more than a very dubious marine suburb of London, a sort of inferior, second-rate Brighton, rendered endurable only by its famous sands and the bare, breezy, open, chalky country that stretches away so wildly toward the North Foreland in its rear. But to those who love the sea and the things that pertain thereto, even prosaic tea-and-shrimpy Margate has its poetical and romantic side.

The very name marks it at once as an extremely ancient Kentish fishing village; and something of the good old picturesque fishing element still clings around the modern stone-girt port. A *mere* in the local Kentish dialect means a brook, or streamlet; and it was the valley of such a mere that formed the gap or gate in the chalk-downs from which the town receives the name of Meregate or Margate. The little harbour at its mouth had a great repute in the fishing and coasting trade during the Middle Ages, and Leland, Henry the Eighth's indefatigable antiquary (who killed himself by riding round all England and taking copious notes on the way), describes the ancient wooden pier "sore decayed," which in his time preceded Rennie's stout modern building of sound and lasting Whitby stone. Indeed, the seafaring traditions of Margate and of all the Thanet ports go much farther back in time than even the earliest period of the Middle Ages, for Ebbsfleet, on the south side of the island, near the dreary expanse of the Minster Level, was the first point in Romanised Britain where the English sea-dogs drove ashore their piratical longships; and at Osengal Hill, between here and Ramsgate, the very graves of those wild old heathen corsairs have been upturned by accident in our own time, and the bones and relics of the earliest Englishmen who ever set foot on the soil we now call after their name, England, have been displayed to the delighted and wondering eyes of modern antiquaries. There they lay in their primitive sepulchres, with their long swords and spearheads, and short Jutish knives huddled beside them, the ancestors of all the tough seafaring folk who have ever since made the Kentish coast famous in history by their dogged courage, endurance, and daring. From that day to this, doubtless, a population of sailors has dwelt all along the thickset series of gates and stairs and passes, which dot the Thanet shores from end to end; and the descendants of those ancient seadogs even now lie up on a stormy evening with their antique fishing vessels in the well-secured artificial port of modern Margate. Here the *Puffin*, too, weary with beating up and down all day among the sandbanks of the Goodwins, comes gladly to rest for the night; for though we have made but little way to-day, we have done a good bit of sketching and knocking about since we set sail this morning, and as the lights begin to appear one by one in the Margate harbour, and the red lantern at the

pier-head is duly lit, with the lower beacon on the jetty behind, three weary mortals creep down into the cosy cabin, tired and hungry, with the easy consciences of men who feel that they have fairly earned their supper by a good day's work. A narrow bunk with a rug spread on top of it is not, indeed, a luxurious couch on which to rest one's limbs after a day's labour, but if you wrap the rug tightly around you, and lay your little hand-bag under your head for a convenient pillow, you will sleep as soundly and wake up as fresh as if you had gone to bed in the best land fashion at the most comfortable and well-appointed tourist-hotel in all Margate. For appetite and sleepitite alike, there is nothing to equal a good sound dose of the fresh sea breezes.

THE MOUTH OF THE THAMES.

MAPLIN SAND

CHAPTER III

FROM MARGATE TO THE MAPLIN LIGHT

AT half-past five next morning we are up betimes on board the *Puffin*, and hoisting sail once more before breakfast, we stand out to sea while the tide still serves us, so as to get a good swim and a dive under the ship's keel, in lieu of the prosaic matutinal tub of everyday terrestrial existence. The excellent sumptuary edicts of the Margate authorities debar us from the enjoyment of a wholesome header in the harbour itself, so we take to the open estuary outside instead, and have as enjoyable a swim off Margate sands as the heart of man could possibly wish for in the clear green tidal water. The jelly fish float idly past us in dozens as we push our way through the short waves of the ebbing tide, and the seagulls scream overhead in obvious doubt as to whether they should regard our bobbing polls in the light of useless flotsam or of good annexable seagull food. Then we scramble on board again, rub ourselves dry and warm once more on deck, each with his solitary regulation towel, indue ourselves in warm woollen jersey and sailor's trousers, and prepare assiduously for the next important event of the present day, our breakfast.

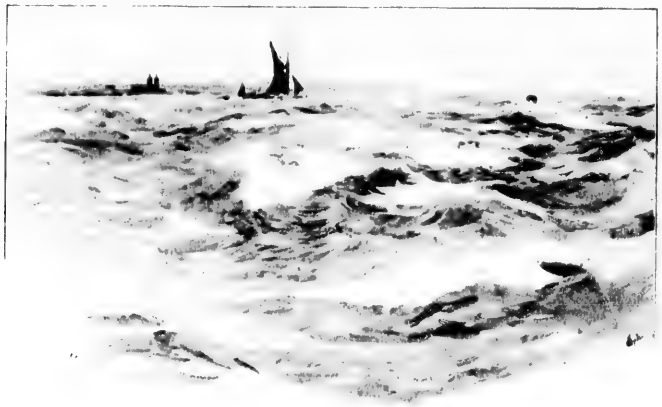
"Want any fish, mate?" shouts a rough voice across the water from a passing smack; and when we gladly answer "Ay!"—fresh fish is always a welcome addition to one's scanty fare at sea—a boat comes alongside promptly with a plentiful supply of still wriggling dabs and red-gilled whiting. We buy what we need, at skipper's prices too, and proceed to clean them ourselves, and cook them over our wee cabin fire for breakfast. There are no fish so delicious as the fish you clean and cook yourself; no tea so full-flavoured as the tea that you drink out of an old marmalade gallipot on the slippery deck of a rough-and-ready yacht; so by the time we have got fairly abreast of Westgate Bay, we feel perfectly prepared to do full justice to our own experimental amateur cookery. Not so very long since, Westgate consisted of little more than a retired coast-guard station, in a pretty broken cove: now, it has risen to the dignity of a thriving fashionable watering-place with unexampled rapidity, and has re-christened itself by the more lofty sounding title of Westgate-on-Sea. A fair wind carries us on easily past the well-known sea-mark of Birchington Round Tower, on the dome-shaped downs behind, and past Monkton Beacon, still further inland, and up the navigable road of Gore Channel, till at last we find ourselves by the buoy on the Hook Sand, where we pause for dinner opposite the ruined empty towers of Reculver Church.

It is a strange weird monument, that old neglected and desecrated church, whose tall twin steeples crest the low clay cliff into which the bold coast line around Margate and the Foreland has hereabout gradually subsided; and it marks the last relic of a once famous spot, the Regulbium of the aboriginal Celt and the conquering Roman, with Richborough, the chief guardian fortress of the Kentish mainland in the first historic age of ancient Britain. Even in early English times the Isle of Thanet was still in reality what it yet remains to-day in name at least, a veritable island; and the small coasting ships of that period, bound from the Channel up river to the Port of London, avoided the dangerous rounding of the North Foreland by sailing up the wide navigable estuary of the Wantsum, which then cut off this insular region from the opposite chalk downs of the Kentish main. We ourselves would have been glad enough to take refuge in such a delightful short cut only yesterday afternoon, when we were battling hard

with the angry tide and wind and current round the jutting promontory of that self-same too obtrusive Foreland; but, alas! the Wantsum has long been silted up and artificially reclaimed in the agricultural interest, so that the seafaring world must now needs go round the outer corner of projecting Thanet as best it may, leaving the forgotten channel to be thickly overgrown with rich pasturage and waving cornfields. The southern portion of the reclaimed tract consists of that misty low-lying Minster Level, through whose damp flats the lazy Stour meanders endlessly in incredible bends and elbows towards the Sandwich Haven and Pegwell Bay (the village of Stourmouth, now some five miles inland, marks by its very name the point where the river once debouched into the open estuary), while the northern half, standing a little higher in elevation, has only now a small backwater of the same main stream (called the Yenlade) flowing through it to the sea beneath the antique Roman castrum at Reculver. A little water thus surrounds the Isle of Thanet even at the present day, to save it from the charge of being a complete misnomer; but in Roman and early English times a broad tidal scour separated it entirely from the neighbouring shore, as the Solent now separates the Isle of Wight from the Hampshire coast, and formed the practicable waterway by which the petty Continental traffic of those uncommercial times turned slowly up the yet unpeopled Thames. During the Roman occupation the channel extended to about a mile in width; by Baeda's time it had narrowed down to three furlongs; but it was not till the days of Henry VII. that the gradual silting up of the inlet compelled the Kentish men to replace the ferry at Sarre by a regular stone bridge and elevated causeway across the intervening marshes.

Thanet being thus exceptionally exposed to piratical attacks, as the later history of the island practically demonstrated, the Romans built a strong castrum at either mouth of the Wantsum short-cut to defend the navigable waterway, one of which, at Rhutupiæ, has degenerated on modern English lips into the clipped form of Richborough; while the other, at Regulbium, has retained the likeness of its ancient name more closely in the corrupt but still recognisable shape of Reculver. The mound on which the familiar twin steeples rest (the Sisters, as sailor folk appropriately name them) represents, in fact, the original square Roman castrum; and the strong wall that girt

it round still remains visible on the south and east, a shattered mass of solid Roman masonry, overgrown even now not only with tangled English creepers, but also with the degenerate fig-trees left behind in the precincts by Italian legionaries or later mediæval monks. The north wall fell into the sea, together with the cliff on which it stood, about the end of the last century; for, strange to say, at the same time that the waves have been silting up the mouth of the Wantsum with their wash in one direction,



THE RECULVERS.

they have been gaining rapidly on all the neighbouring coastline in another, the average waste of the land between the North Foreland and the towers of Reculver, as Lyell showed, being about two feet in every twelvemonth. The relative position of Reculver church and castrum to the sea is one of the best known tests of this gradual encroachment. In Leland's time the waves still beat upon the shore a quarter of a mile from the north wall of the desolate Roman fortress; by the year 1780 they had swallowed up all the intervening distance, and proceeded to demolish the north wall itself, while they have only been checked from blotting out utterly the very site of Reculver by an artificial sea-wall and embankment.

Reculver church, whose ruins every sailor up and down the tidal Thames knows so well, has a history of its own, almost as interesting in its peculiar way as that of the massive Roman castle within whose precincts its shattered walls still stand in melancholy ruins. Here Ethelbert of Kent, the first Christian king of all England, had a palace built from the remains of the disused fort; and with that odd historical continuity so noticeable everywhere on English soil, the little village inn bears still the name of "King Ethelbert" for its modest sign. Half a century later, one of his successors "gave Raculf to Bass, the mass-priest, to timber a minster," and the church whose weather-worn relics cap the low cliff to-day is the lineal representative of the wooden building then erected by the Jutish monk on the commanding summit of the old Roman site. But at all times Reculver church has had a distinct connection with the Thames waterway, for tradition says the original towers were erected as a guide to sailors by a certain Abbess of Davington, whose sister had been wrecked off the neighbouring coast; and when these towers fell into disrepair, the present "Sisters" were built by the Trinity Board, avowedly to serve as a beacon for the intricate navigation of the opposite shoals. The greater part of the old church was pulled down in 1809, after the sea had begun to break down the actual enclosure of the castrum on which it stands; but the towers still guide the mariner on stormy mornings, up and down the Gore and Horse channels, and away from the dangerous stretches of the Hook, the Last, and the Reculver banks.

The flats off Whitstable bear the quaintly expressive title of the Pan Sand, while another distinct shoal in the same neighbourhood is called by the still more characteristic name of the Pudding Pan Rocks. Here the Whitstable oyster fishers, in their laudable pursuit of the inestimable native, dredge up immense quantities of that bright red Roman pottery, commonly, though rather absurdly, described as Samian ware. These are the "pudding-pans" of unsophisticated seafaring folk, who account for their presence there by supposing that a ship laden with red crocks from France (they haven't yet reached the stage of artificial culture at which the opposite coast would be described with greater historical accuracy as Gaul) foundered on the dangerous shoals of this shifting and uncertain shore. But it seems

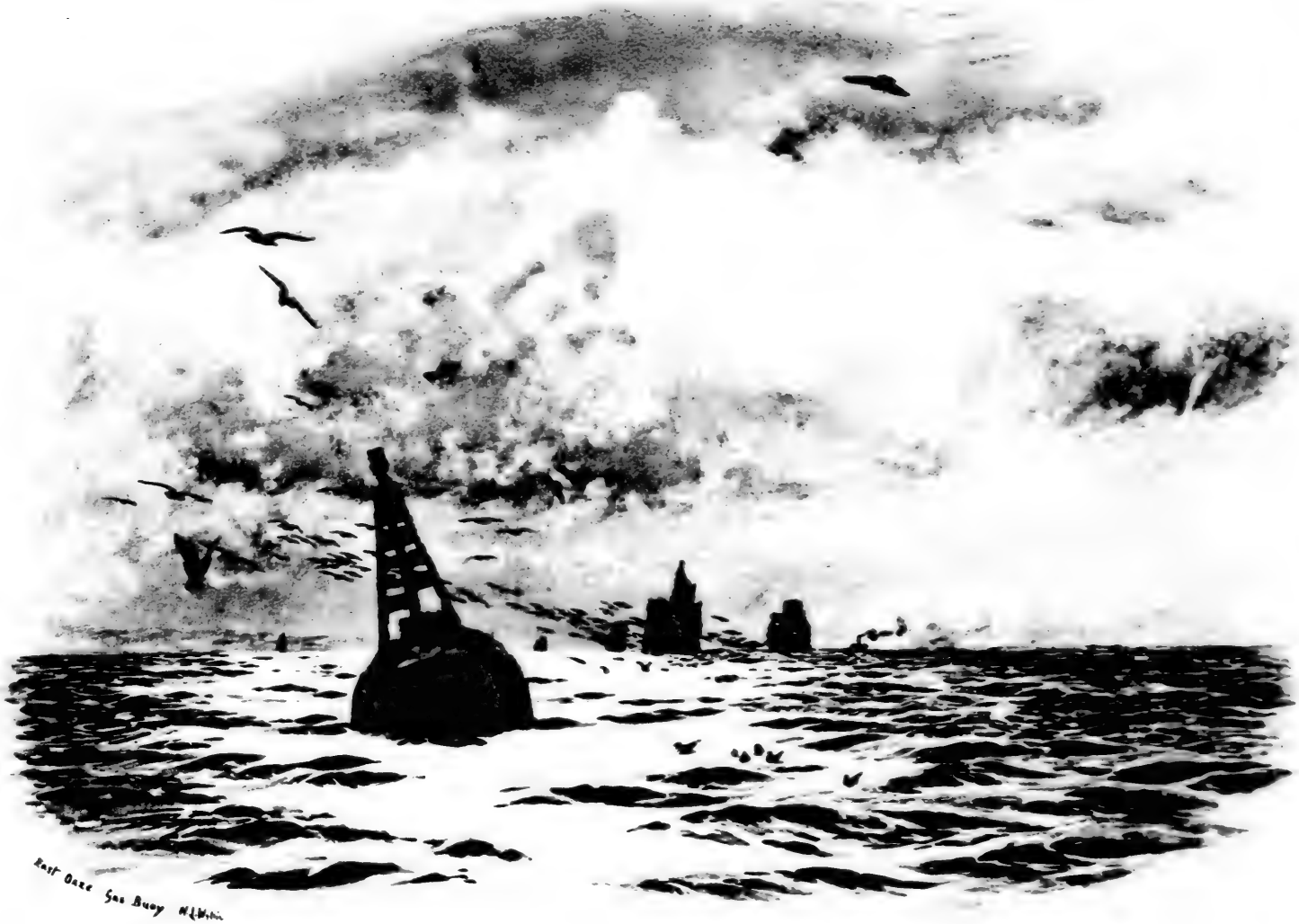
more probable on the whole that the Pan Sands represent the site of an ancient Romano-British pottery (like the one whose remains are found so abundantly near Overton, in Northamptonshire), and that the encroaching sea has gradually eaten away the low earthen cliffs which here form the sole fragile bulwark of the Kentish mainland. We shall meet with other indications, as we go up the estuary, that the land once stretched far more northward into the central channel, and that the present line of coast differs widely from that which existed in the days of the Roman occupation. For example, a bank of shingle, a mile off the shore at Whitstable, still bears the name of Whitstable Street, marking it as the former situation of a Roman high road, while the immense sandbank that lies off the north coast of Sheppey retains even now its ancient Celtic title of the Cant (or Lowland), a word identical with the Cantium of early geographers, and the modern English county name of Kent.

Whilst we have been loitering ashore with the dingey on the Hook Sand, the clouds have slowly banked up over the Kentish mainland in threatening fashion, and by the time dinner is well over the wind has freshened, and rain falls drop by drop from the leaden sky that now lowers ominously overhead. So before we weigh anchor for a fresh start everything is made snug on board against nasty weather. We take in the mizzen, reef the bowsprit to half its length, and reduce our mainsail for the coming breeze. The wind is rising still as we stand away up Gore channel, and the mist and rain soon blot out entirely the Reculver Sisters. By-and-by we find the wind is working rapidly round to westward, as we can now no longer lay our course, but have to tack repeatedly in the narrows between the Hook and Reculver Sand. The strong tide running to windward works up a confused and troubled sea, which, as the gale rises, breaks over our deck in blinding showers, stinging our faces and drenching us to the skin with salt water. The little vessel, trembling and straining in every timber, struggles manfully over the steep short waves, now jumping half her length out of water in the trough, and now again burying her nose deep in the laughing spray. Yonder long line of white water north of us marks the Woolpack, and east of it lies the Last, in shape rather like a man's foot. Thence we work slowly to windward past the long line of black buoys

which demarcate the north side of the Horse Channel. As the very last, crowned with a staff and cage, comes fairly into sight, a heavy squall bursts upon us, and in a moment nothing can be seen farther than a yard or two all round the vessel. "Let go foresail haulyards—stand by to drop the peak," roars the voice of the skipper, as with the gunwale under we dash along careering, pressed down hard by the sudden force of the gale. The worst is soon over, however, and the wind shifts to the north-west as the squall passes away, leaving bright sunlight and blue sky overhead, while we stand over the flats towards the Pan Sand. The distant objects now al: tell out distinct and clear: the red light-vessels of the Princess Channel, the picturesque sailing ships and heavy steamers bound up or down it, the high land of Sheppey just across the stream, and even the further cliffs of Margate far away to leeward, shining white after the passing shower. We have still plenty of wind, and the lopping tawny waves break short over the bows, covering us with spray as badly as ever. That tall black line against the sky on our weather bow is the Pan Sand Beacon. Enough water stands over the shoals now to let us run up close to it, scaring two green-eyed cormorants who perched securely a moment before upon its topmost summit. A thick spar, with a lighter one stepped on the top—that is the beacon; while all the way up runs a sort of rough ladder composed of blocks of wood, nailed rudely one above the other. At the head stands a great rough wooden cage, painted black as a distinctive token. We tack now, and passing close to the West Pan Sand with its red nun buoy surmounted by the regulation staff and ball, we stand in at last for the open mouth of the East Swale, as the creek is called that divides Sheppey from the Kentish mainland. An hour or two more of struggle with wind and waves brings us into calm water under the lee of Shellness, and all our rigging hung with wet clothes, we run gaily up the Swale itself past Harty Ferry. Then, making our way up the creek that leads to Faversham, we put our nose into a comfortable mudbank, and finishing up with high tea, turn in for a really comfortable night.

Up betimes next morning with the first streak of dawn, we drop down the creek in a white mist, the stars shining feebly through overhead, and the surrounding shore lost to vision. Hardly a breath of wind stirs at

East Ouse Gas Buoy.


East Oaze Sea Buoy

first; but as the day breaks a little breeze comes from off the marshes; so setting a great calico spinaker, we are soon silently running down the East Swale, with the little *Puffin* looking like a phantom in the solemn shroud of pallid fog. The wind keeps all aloft, and not a ripple breaks the water through which we are slipping at such a decent pace. As we pass Whitstable with its fleet of oyster smacks, the sun rises, and soon the mist has melted into thin air. What a wonderful contrast to-day to yesterday! The sea stands as calm as a millpond. Bright blue sky hangs overhead, and in the perfect silence we can catch the noise from the paddles of steamers far away in the haze of the Prince's Channel, or the whistles of railway engines yet further off on the retreating mainland well astern of us. The heavy sails hang down as listless as in a dead calm, but our light spinaker, swelling out gracefully with the gentle breeze, still carries us quietly out to sea. The land has sunk now to a pale grey line, and we have fairly passed the Pan Sand beacon; but a brass band on shore can yet be heard quite distinctly across the water, big drum and all. This is indeed a glorious day. The dew on deck has not yet dried, and we have spun already as far as the mouth of the Queen's Channel. Still we have moved but little this last half-hour, and now the wind is deserting us altogether, and we lie without motion on the glassy surface of the North Sea. Not a sound stirs save when a porpoise or two comes for a moment to blow at the surface. A little fleet of sailing vessels near us stands unmoved, as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean. We are all alike drifting gently on the ebb tide past the Tongue light-vessel. The throbbing steamers that pass us by disdainfully leave behind them fantastic lines of trailing smoke that drift idly into innumerable weird and curious shapes in the still and placid air around us. Noon comes and goes, and the tide is drifting us helplessly back into the open river. Still, not a breath of wind rises, and the long reflections of all the becalmed ships seem the only things that move at all anywhere near us. Now and then, however, a steamer goes pounding past and mocks our misery. Away to the north of us for nineteen endless miles stretches the Long Sand. To the north-east lies the Kentish Knock, twelve miles away, and beyond that again stands the huge basking mass of the Galloper. To the south, Margate sands block the way, but eastward all is

open sea until you reach the West Hinder, forty miles off, upon the Flemish banks. No wind and no motion. Stay! what is that? A large schooner on the horizon that has not moved these three hours has now heeled gently, and is coming up to us fast before an evident breeze. Soon a dark blue line shows all along the sea that the wind is rapidly advancing at last. We run forward and prepare in a moment for the expected breeze. The dark line moves nearer and nearer, and the whole surface of the glassy sea is swept everywhere with the welcome dash of little catspaws. The sails fill, and away we run up the main highway of the Prince's Channel. By-and-by we get abreast of the Tongue light-vessel. She shows at night two lights, the upper white and the lower red. Then we run by the black and white vertical stripes of a can buoy, after which a nun with a cage painted in the same way guides our course across the trackless waters. Away on the starboard hand lie the Shingles, marked by red nuns and a tall beacon surmounted by a triangle. Next comes the Prince's light-vessel with red revolving light showing fresh every twenty seconds. Here the Alexandra Channel, a newly buoyed trackway, as its very modern name imports, branches off north of the West Girdler. A black can and two beacons, followed in due course by another black can, lead us at last abreast of the Girdler light-vessel, with white light revolving every thirty seconds. Hence the road bends to the right to clear the Shivering Sand, guarded for vessels with a bell buoy. As this is a very important turning-point in the open stream, the Maplin lighthouse throws a white ray across the trackless path to warn ships when to alter their course in either direction. We next make for the East Oaze, whose black and white buoy is filled with compressed gas, which burns steadily for a fortnight or so at a sitting. Finally we reach the Mouse light-vessel with green revolving lantern; and porting our helm we run away gaily down the Swin for the distant and looming Maplin light. The terrestrial intelligence might easily suppose from a casual glance at the chart that these buoys and lights stand very close indeed together, so that it would be quite impossible to lose your way between them; and no doubt on a clear day like this, with a fair wind carrying one ahead, it is no very difficult task to sail by their aid into the yawning mouth of the now cloudless Thames. But when you actually come to try it, the

buoys do certainly seem a long way apart, and puzzlingly arranged one with the other. You lose sight of the first buoy before you catch a glimpse of the next, and in thick weather or on a dark night, what with the white lights of anchored ships and the red or green side lights of vessels under way moving all around you in every direction, and perhaps with tide setting right across your beam, it is small wonder if you get a little out of your reckoning now and then, and fail to perceive the same beautiful regularity in the buoys and beacons of real life which so charmed your 'prentice mind in the Admiralty chart and the "Sailing Directions."

The Maplin light, whither we are now bound, stands on the north or Essex bank of the great estuary, here practically almost an open sea; and our course thither lies right along the main stream of commerce which pours unceasingly up and down the broad highway of the Swin, between the Port of London on the one hand, and the high seas on the other. In this Cheapside of the shipping interest, every kind and species of marine carrier may be seen and studied in plentiful abundance. Here on one hand goes a great lumbering heavy coal-steamer, distinguished by her owner's apt device of a black diamond painted conspicuously on the big white funnel; there, a wee bit further, through the faint grey haze, a light Norwegian timber vessel lies at anchor a little on one side, waiting for a favourable wind for Norway; and yonder, steaming up with all haste, flags flying and passengers leaning gladly over her bulwarks, a Rotterdam packet hurries upward with the flowing tide, to land her expectant throng at London Bridge before the fall of evening. Lumbering barges set their russet sails on one hand, white-sailed yachts fly past swiftly on the other, while in between, shrimpers and smacks and tugs and billy-boys sail along at all angles to one another, crossing and recrossing each other's path in picturesque confusion. How on earth they ever avoid colliding with one another at every tack is a standing marvel to the unnautical spectator, for each vessel seems to go on her own way entirely irrespective of all the others, and to run full tilt at extraordinary angles with all the other craft on the whole river. And yet in reality that mysterious subject, the rule of the road at sea, is far simpler (when once you know it) than most landsmen originally suspect.

The huge yellow continent towards which we are now steering athwart the West Swin—the main channel for the North Sea trade—is the Maplin Sand, the largest and widest of all the huge shoals that line the lower end of the Thames estuary. It lies for many miles along the northern or Essex shore of the river, beginning at Leigh Bay, near Southend, passing under Southend pier as a vast and dreary mudflat, altering gradually into a firm and tawny sand as it rounds the dim low spit of Shoeburyness, and thence skirting the whole Essex coast in endless succession as far as the mouth of the Crouch river. The Maplin dries at low water along almost its entire length, and its outer edge is steep, like a cliff of sand, so that a vessel can easily lie off and land a passenger on its yellow levels. In the thickest portion the sands are nearly five miles wide, but they are covered with water again at about an hour and half after the turn of the tide. Nothing can well be drearier or more monotonous in its way than a long walk across this temporary desert on the English coast. As you pace up and down its wide expanse you might almost imagine yourself in Sahara, but for the want of camels (nobody ever dreamt of painting a desert without the camels) and for the starfish and medusæ that lie thickly strewn over its whole basking surface. To the north, east, and west nothing appears in any direction but endless sand, sand, sand: here ribbed, there irregularly puckered, yonder heaved up into an undulating ridge, or depressed once more into a basin-like hollow; while southward, a muddy sea breaks in white foam over the low bank that forms its well-demarcated edge, and a few tall masts show in the centre of the West Swin Channel, as the solitary symbols of human life and occupation.

Near the east end of this extensive flat the Maplin lighthouse, one of the most picturesque objects on the whole course of the lower Thames, rises up in solitary grandeur over the tawny waste from the midst of an angry, fitful, and tempestuous sea. A great red mass, raised aloft from the surface upon solid screw piles which are firmly planted in the bottom below, not perpendicularly, as is usually the case, but at a slight converging angle, it forms as beautiful and interesting a scene as anything to be found between London and the North Foreland. Indeed, though the vivid colour of these numerous beacons and light-ships has, of course, been dictated by

purely utilitarian necessities, it is wonderful how magnificently it harmonises and contrasts with the various brown or grey or russet tinges of every other object in the generally dull surroundings among which they stand. For deep reds and chocolates especially, there is nothing on earth like a tidal river. Tints that would be almost impossible anywhere else in Nature are here not only allowable but also true. There is an Oriental richness and vividness about the occasional objects of the Lower Thames which entirely redeems the estuary from that thoughtless charge of dulness and greyness that dull grey eyes too often persist in bringing against it. Only, if you wish to see the tidal river as it is, you must not merely gaze at its flats and mudbanks from the neighbouring shore, nor hurry up and down its main routes on the prosaic deck of a passenger or excursion steamer; you must be content to look lovingly at all its minor creeks and channels, to wind your way tortuously in and out of its barrows or its oases, and to sail up close under the green weedy tresses that hang from the tide-covered timbers of its numerous beacons and its sturdy lighthouses. Then indeed you will find a wealth of colouring and a variety of tone that you could hardly equal under any other circumstances until you reached the narrow lanes and round-domed mosques and gay eastern costumes of Stamboul, Cairo, and Jerusalem.

It is one of the great advantages of your lighthouse, too, that he is a good sitter; no small recommendation, indeed, in the eyes of that much-harassed and perplexed devotee of art, the marine painter. Ships, unfortunately, won't sit, especially under canvas; at the exact moment you think you have fixed your cutter or your sloop, with the wind picturesquely bellying her sails, and stern and broadside standing out in the most delightful possible perspective, ten to one but she luffs incontinently, for no other reason on earth than because her course demands it, and without the slightest reference to the personal needs of the hapless and disappointed being who has only just that moment succeeded in rapidly sketching half her profile. Even a barge by a wharf, if you begin to paint her, seems half unconsciously to resent the insult, and casts off at once, on purpose to deprive the unhappy bystander of his cherished chance of a pretty picture. Everything else at sea, except the lighthouses, will dance and skip

like the little hills of Scripture the moment they see a sheet of good white drawing-paper set fairly before them; the lighthouses alone stand still with exemplary patience, and allow a man to finish his sketch of their features in peace and quiet. Or stay, there is one other thing besides a lighthouse that makes a good sitter for the marine painter, and that pathetic object is a sunken and half-buried wreck. There is one on the Maplin over yonder, by the very edge of the sand-cliff, and with the aid of our little boat we are going to land on the big ridge that the tide is even now rising around so rapidly, and make a hasty water-colour of her mouldering beams and green-grown relics.

It isn't all plain sailing, indeed, this ardent pursuit of the picturesque on the tidal Thames. Take, for example, the pretty bit of engulfed wreck, which forms the headpiece to this chapter, peeping out bows uppermost from the grey edge of the Maplin, on whose shoals she struck, a mere fragment of the knightheads with the eye-like hawseholes, and a shattered windlass overgrown by drooping ooze of moss-like wrack. Easy enough to paint, one would say, before one had tried it, but the physical difficulties alone in the way are a great deal stronger than anyone can readily believe who hasn't seen them. You must land on the sandbank from a small boat, carrying colours and paper carefully with you; and then you must stand most likely either in rain or Thames fog for half an hour opposite the broken wreck, while the tide slowly rises on every side around your chosen standpoint. Step by step the water gains on you gradually, coming first up to your soles, then to your ankles, then to your calf, and finally to your knee, till, as the last finishing-touches are put upon the sketch, you are glad to save yourself from the breakers in your boat, holding the precious piece of paper high above your head, out of reach of the spray, and lucky if you finally pull to the yawl with nothing worse by way of a ducking than a wet jacket. That is the obverse or actuality side of a marine painter's somewhat chequered and varied existence; and indeed marine painters are, for the most part, a hardy and uncomplaining race of mortals. Use has accustomed them to stand all winds and weathers with the perfect unconcern of the common mariner. Hardships that would daunt most ordinary landsmen are accepted by those tough souls with admirable stoicism. I speak, of course, of the genuine or seafaring

marine painters. For there is a spurious, or dry-land, imitation of the real article, which usurps the name indeed, but has nothing to do with the sea, except to sit on the shore and paint the waves from a safe distance. For this sand-dabbling kind we, who have once tossed about in an open boat with the Henry Moores or the Wyllies to the manner born, can't help feeling in our own minds something very like a politely-veiled contempt.

OFF HARWICH.

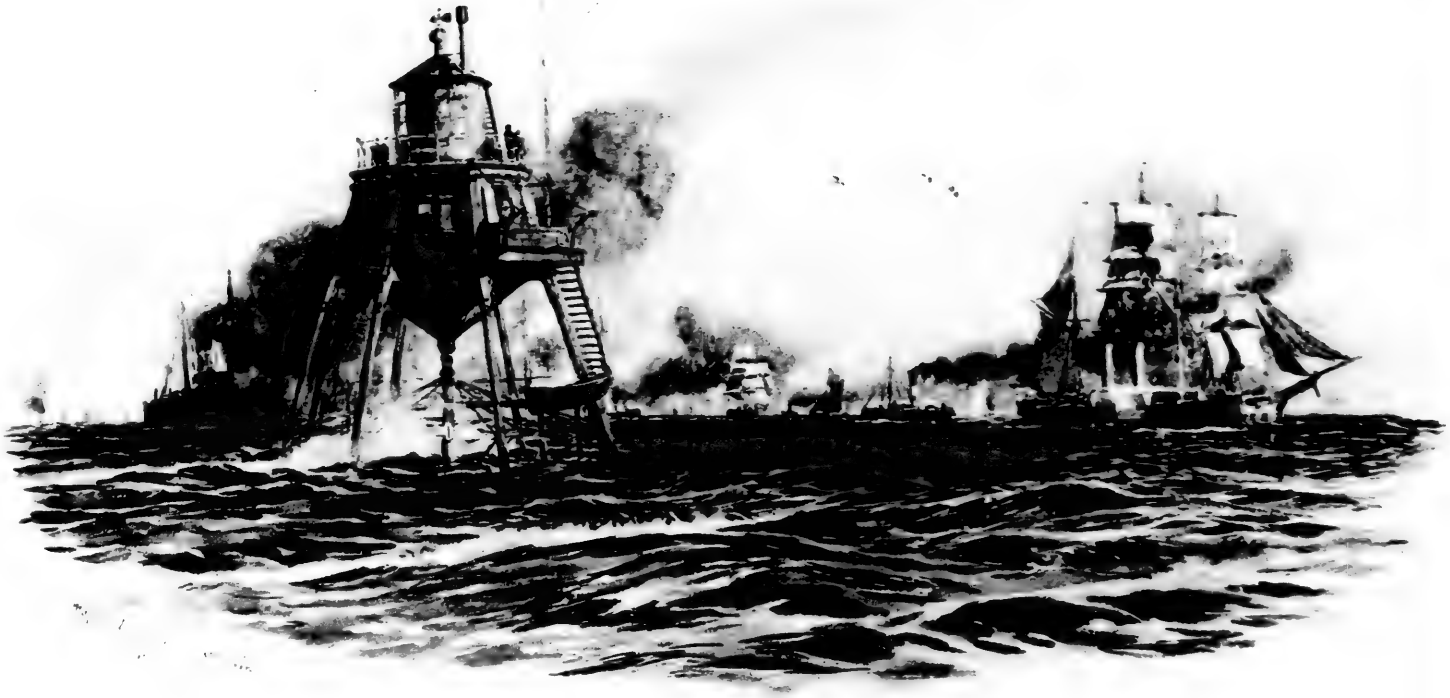
THE BLACKWATER

CHAPTER IV.

THE ESSEX ESTUARIES

SO far we have been cruising about, mainly along the southern or Kentish shore of the river-mouth, and seeing but little of the northern coast, which trends away in a bolder sweep outward to the gloomy Essex marshlands and the bulging peninsula of the Suffolk flats. To-day, however, after a stormy night passed at anchor in one of the creeks that drain the eastern Maplin, we set our course more steadily north-east, and run before wind and tide along the broad navigable channel of the Swin for the port of Harwich. At flood-time we could hardly make much way in the little *Puffin* with a foul wind, for the flood sets here for the first two hours with extraordinary velocity; but at ebb it sucks us on fiercely in the opposite direction, while in the West Swin, between the Mouse and the Maplin, it draws us before it with wonderful strength out towards the open German Ocean. For now again the rolling of our taut little yawl clearly tells us we are fairly free of the lower river and afloat on what can only fitly be described as the outer estuary. A long run carries us all day through the Swin and the Shipway, with the salt foam dashing gloriously in our faces, and lands us safely late at night in the mouth of the Ore or Alde river, which flows into the sea at the eastern extremity of the Suffolk coast, near Orfordness.

Maplin Light and West Swin.



A straight line drawn from Orfordness to the North Foreland would exactly enclose the Thames estuary in the wider sense in which we have accepted the term for the purposes of this cruise, with its accompanying sketches and descriptive narrative.

The Swin, through which the *Puffin* ploughs her way bravely the live-long morning, though it forms the main line of the North Sea trade to Holland, the Baltic, and the east coast of Scotland, cannot boast of being quite so thickly peopled with heavy shipping as the larger mercantile tracks that carry the traffic of London and the Thames round the North Foreland and out into the broad Atlantic by the English Channel. At best, the North Sea is but a common restricted Teutonic highway, not, like the English Channel, a cosmopolitan maritime road, leading straight out in diverse directions to Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. But the colliers make up in number for the lack of greater craft, for they can crowd two trips to Newcastle into a week, instead of dragging out three months in a single voyage to India or China. Timber from Norway also comes this way to the Port of London. As we glide with pitching motion before the free west wind down the sweeping curves and mazes of the Swin, we meet comparatively few deeply-laden merchantmen, such as those whose huge hulls we saw pressed down far into the water to the very verge of Plimsoll's line with weight of West Indian sugar, or Egyptian wheat, or Indian fabrics, in the crowded lanes of the Prince's Channel; and only an occasional steamer here drags its long track of foam across the dark brown water, with trailing pennant of smoke streaming in murky magnificence far, far behind its oblique black funnel. But, on the other hand, the fisher vessels of the North Sea crowd thickly up and down this principal path to the great sole-breeding bank of the Dogger and the lively quays of Great Grimsby, Lowestoft, and Yarmouth, intermingled with the farmers' big barges from Maldon and Harwich, Ipswich and Colchester, with great stacks of straw and hay piled half-way up their encumbered masts, taking the chance of a fine day to slip round in haste and trembling from their own ports to the London river. What the Swin thus loses in size of craft, it certainly gains in beauty and picturesqueness, for there are few ships on English waters which have kept their ancient simplicity and quaintness of rig so

long unspoilt as the smacks and dredgers of the low East Anglian fishing region.

We spend the night in the little estuary or haven of the Alde at Orford, and set out next morning to explore the curious bit of coast that stretches hence along the arched curve of Hollesley Bay as far as Orfordness, the extreme limit of the Thames mouth, even in the widest sense of the phrase, and the furthest outward point which we have set before ourselves as falling within the projected compass of our present expedition. It is a queer and odd-looking bit of shore, this shingle barrier that separates the Ore from the German Ocean, a sort of Chesil Bank on a small scale, with the sea on the left and the river on the right, while the tongue of pebbly beach stretches between them for a distance of some nine miles, as if on purpose to frustrate or at least delay their intended junction. One can hardly stand by the martello tower on the high ridge that severs sea and stream with its narrow span at Aldeborough without the memory of Tennyson's exquisite lines in the "Morte d'Arthur" rising instinctively in the echoing chambers of one's brain:

> A broken chancel with a broken cross
> That stood on a dark strait of barren land.
> On one side lay the ocean, and on one
> Lay a great water, and the moon was full.

The lines were written, of course, for the wild Cornish coast, with its storm-beaten granite crags, where the cormorant sits expectant on her beetling perch above the black abyss of the furious Atlantic—not for the low shelving Suffolk shore, where the breakers of the North Sea drive the rolling shingle helplessly before them on to the shallow marshy mudbanks; but the description suits the one scene as well as the other (if not a little better, to parody a pardonable Hibernicism), and the dreary desolateness of the flooded Alde at high tide is almost as much in keeping with the pensive melancholy tone of the "Morte d'Arthur" as even the dark stretches of Dozmary Pool, where the Laureate's graphic word-picture is usually localised by common tradition. At any rate, this strange Orfordness pebble-ridge is in itself a very singular and beautiful feature of East Anglian coast scenery, and its origin well deserves a moment's consideration at the hands of the passing geologically-minded tourist.

The Alde river on its way seaward from the low Suffolk hills among which it takes its rise approaches close to the shore at Aldeborough—"The Borough" of Crabbe's delightfully naive rural sketch—and seems as though it meant at once to empty itself into the sea beside the picturesque quays and timbered moot-hall and red-tiled lodging-houses of that pretty and retired old-world watering-place. But a belt of high beach opposes this its natural and normal intention, so that after arriving within a hundred yards of the high-tide mark it trends sharply southward once more, as though by a sudden afterthought, to avoid the obstruction, and continues to run

ORFORDNESS.

for nine miles further parallel with the shore, from which it is only divided by the beach itself or occasionally by a somewhat wider strip of weltering marshland. The broad or mere thus banked up by the tall bar of shingle is Orford Haven—the river bears the name of Alde at Aldeborough, and of Ore at Orford—a pretty inlet, crowded with herons and gulls, where the shrill scream of the sea-swallows is heard continually in the air overhead, and the rarer shore-birds of the East Anglian swamps may often be startled from their deep recesses among the tall reed-grass of the flooded islands. Evidently, the origin of this curious brackish lagoon with its boundary reef of heaped-up shingle must have been somewhat after the following fashion. The Alde must at first have flowed into the sea at Aldeborough, its natural

outlet, and must have deposited a bank of muddy silt at its mouth, like so many others of the Norfolk or Suffolk rivers. On this bank of silt the waves of the German Ocean, driven by the prevailing north-east wind, must have piled up a lofty beach of water-rolled pebbles, which would be highest and thickest at the northern and eastern end. The gathering beach would compel the river to turn southward in order to discharge its waters, and would cause it to deposit a second low bank of alluvial débris at its new exit. But the shingle, still collecting and driving before the dominant wind, would proceed to occupy this second shelf; and so, from age to age, the Alde would be forced to wander aimlessly yet further southward, and the beach would stretch for longer and ever longer distances parallel with its general course. At the present day, when it has reached as far as Hollesley, nine miles down, the self-same action still continues, and the shingle is even now being extended southward by every great north-easter storm.

Orfordness itself consists of the jutting elbow or most projecting portion of this long and narrow spit of alluvial land. In front stretches the sea, bordered by the tall beach; in the rear a low level of silt, much intersected by staked dykes of seaweed withering in the mud, runs down to the Ore a little above Orford. The intervening space bears the name of Lantern Marshes, which testifies to the antiquity of some kind of beacon on this exposed spithead. Two huge red and white lighthouses now warn off vessels from the low shore, whose line is hardly visible at a little distance out in stormy weather; they rank among the finest and best-constructed lanterns on the whole British coast. Orford Castle keep, standing on the summit of a high grassy mound (apparently artificial) in the background, across the Ore, also serves as a well-known sea-mark to ships bound from Holland for Harwich; and its utility in this respect has been so long recognised that when a Vandal Marquis of Hertford at the beginning of the present century proposed to pull it down (*heu nefas!*) the Government of the day, which could take no kindly interest in our historical monuments as such, interfered to save it from destruction by its favourable intercession, from the point of view of nautical necessities alone. Happily this magnificent specimen of a later Norman castle building (it may date back as far as the reign of Stephen) is now safe in the excellent keeping of Sir Richard Wallace, who

has fitted it up as a small museum of domestic art and solid old English household furniture. The finest view of Orfordness and the Alde estuary, with the yellow waters of the German Ocean pied with frequent sails beyond, is to be had from the tall battlements that still cap the solid keep of this noble East Anglian stronghold.

At Aldeborough Napes, an isolated ledge of sandbank marked by a dancing black buoy, over whose top the spray of the sea is now breaking merrily, we twist again sharply on our course for our return run southward, and see the porpoises hard by displaying their huge fat sides in play upon the foaming surface, or riding through the trough of the sea with black back and tall stiff fin just showing for a second between crest and crest of the short lopping North Sea billows. How they sport and dash and frolic! In what fantastic curves they spring and gambol among the boisterous waves, as if rejoicing in their wild freedom and extraordinary grip of muscular power! They follow us steadily round the point of Orfordness and past the telegraph station where the submarine cable starts on its long journey for Holland (ware cable in anchoring off the low spit!) till we run round into the very mouth of Harwich Harbour. So rapidly do they stem the water that though we are scudding before a clear blue north-easter (wind has luckily shifted since yesterday)—and the *Puffin* can make fair way with all her canvas on her, too—the porpoises play round us carelessly, as a dog runs round a carriage on the road—now in front of us, now behind us, and now turning aside awhile, attracted by some passing novelty, only to catch us up a minute later and dash ahead of us once more through the lumpy water with incomprehensible and almost inconceivable rapidity.

The path from Orfordness for Harwich leads on past the Cutler. Bring Orfordness low lighthouse a little open to the north-west of the high lighthouse, "with Bawdsey Church north-north-west half west; keep her away a little, will you?" till you are near the north-east end of the Cutler, and then open the low light to eastward; and so, steering by Ramsholt Church to the westward of Bawdsey Cliff into Felixstow Roads, till Dovercourt lighthouses bear north-west by west half west to port of you. Rather hieroglyphic to the unnautical mind, no doubt: well then, let us be perfectly

candid and confess that till we ourselves learnt to box the compass on this very cruise, and to port the helm when duly ordered by constituted authority, and to bring her round to the wind on cause shown, we were just as ignorant for our own part of the hidden meaning conveyed by this pleasant seafaring jargon, which nevertheless carries with it so many delightful reminiscences of idle days deliciously spent with the salt breeze blowing in one's face, and the boundless horizon stretching away illimitably on either side, without the bare possibility of post or telegram or daily paper coming to disturb your placid morning's quiet enjoyment. The lotus eaters were tired of "ever climbing up the climbing wave," were they? They longed for land and respite from toil and moil and wandering. We, in these days, have learnt better. The penny post has driven us on the sea, and we know that the sea is the best place left for modern lotus-eating.

The ancient port of Harwich-on-the-Naze, situated among the converging estuaries of the Stour and the Orwell, has begun of late years to recover some of the prestige which it lost during the long eclipse of trade and navigation in this formerly flourishing corner of mediæval England. In the Middle Ages, indeed, while English con[illegible]ce still turned eastward to the civilised continent, rather than westward to the open and barren Atlantic, the Orwell, with its mouth pointing full upon the wealthy merchant commonwealths of Antwerp and Ghent and Brussels and the Low Countries, ranked perhaps highest in commercial importance among the whole long roll of English rivers. Ipswich centred on itself the entire British wool trade with the staples of Flanders, and Walton formed the favourite port of embarcation for travellers bound to the rich cities of the Scheldt or the Rhine-mouth. Harwich itself was the principal landing-place for comfortable Holbeinesque merchants from the ports of Holland, and even some half century later it was the haven whence Frobisher sailed with his little fleet on his famous voyage of exploration in search of that elusive and finally impracticable North-West Passage—"the only thing of the world that was yet left undone by which a notable minde might still be made famous and fortunate." At the beginning of the present century, however, Harwich harbour had fallen into a pitiable state of neglect and desuetude; steamers diverted the North Sea trade to London or elsewhere; the shingle

beach on Landguard Point, growing continually with the heaping-up of pebbles by the aggressive north-easters, almost choked the entrance to the port, and the once flourishing haven sank nearly to the position of a struggling second-rate fishing village. At last, in 1863, the Great Eastern Railway Company was happily minded, having run its line into Harwich, to start a service of steamboats across to Rotterdam and Antwerp; a long stone breakwater was run out to sea in front of Beacon Cliff to check the filling-up of the new channel; and the entrance was dredged out to its former depth, and protected for the future by a line of sturdy groynes on the rolling front of Landguard beach. At present the harbour ranks once more as one of the finest on the east coast of England, and gives shelter at times when the "grey east wind" is careering too wildly in its own fearless fashion over the German Ocean, to as many as four hundred sail of all burdens on a single morning. Landguard Fort, on the spit of land opposite (once an island), with heavy guns covering the entrance of the Stour and Orwell, and the neighbouring batteries, as well as the numerous martello towers along the shelving coast, add a certain grim picturesqueness of their own to the busy scene; while as a great fishing station, Harwich is naturally rich in the usual special attractions for the lover of the picturesque always afforded by the uncontaminated piscatorial interest. Immense quantities of lobsters are brought over from their favourite rocky breeding-places on the Norwegian coast and fattened for a time in tanks here in an extensive lobster nursery, whence they are finally despatched to find a hot-watery grave at the London fishmongers'! Many smacks also engage in the productive fishery off the Dogger Bank; and in summer the Kentish shrimpers muster in force at Harwich, only returning to their own county with full pockets and empty craft at the beginning of October.

The low dim promontory that opens out to leeward as you turn south from the estuary of the Orwell is the Naze, whose modern name has been worn down to a mere abbreviation of its original title, Eadulf's Nase—the word being at bottom identical both with Nose and Ness. It is the same old Scandinavian root which reappears in Shoeburyness, and even in capes Grisnez and Blanenez on the opposite French coast. We shall meet it again in a still more distorted form when we run up the river to the Nore.

Beyond the Naze we cut obliquely across a great bight that runs in among the purple Essex marshlands, whose faint bluish outline we can only occasionally descry across the long yellow foreground of flats and sandbanks. This is the estuary of the Colne and the Blackwater, up which latter river we diverge, as in duty bound, to visit Maldon, the Custom House of Leigh, whose familiar mark, MN 47 or MN 29, we have already noticed printed in bold black letters on the rich brown sails of many a light shrimper or lumbering smack or clumsy hay-barge as we danced about before the carrying wind along the Thames reaches. The Blackwater or Pant (the latter doubtless its original British name) forms the very type of these sluggish Essex tidal tributaries, with their long flat banks and endless muddy backwaters dividing and subdividing round marshy islands and big projecting alluvial peninsulas. But its stream is much cleaner than Thames water, with dark waving seaweed fastened at the bottom, from which it derives its pretty old-world Saxon title. The whole surrounding country here remains as a standing monument of work wrought by the tidal Thames, for it consists entirely of rich silt deposited by the river and its confluents, and continually reinforced by fresh acquisitions from the same slow-acting cause. Indeed, a vast proportion of the flat lands around the Lower Thames consists of such recent alluvial gains, especially in Sheppey, at Shoeburyness, at Foulness Island, and around the encumbered swampy mouths of the Crouch, the Colne, the Chelmer, and the Blackwater.

The Colne itself, commonly called by fishermen the Colchester Creek, is a famous oyster-fishing centre, and the well-known letters CK on the sails of smacks from its dependent Britlingsea may be seen everywhere on British seas, from the Channel Islands to the north of Shetland; but the trade is now bad, and yacht-building is at present the chief business of the tidal river. The Britlingsea men make first-rate yachtsmen too, of a very fine and sturdy pattern.

Yonder great sandbanks on our left as we sail up the busy little Blackwater are the Danesey Flats, and the whole Hundred behind them bears also the name of Dengey or Danesey—that is to say, the Danes' Island. Your Scandin[illegible] d such insular tracts as this, with interlacing fiords and num[illegible] inlets, where he could entrench

Oyster Dredgers.

himself in comfort in his island stronghold and dodge the king's reeves with his light sea-dragons among the familiar creeks whenever the heavy Saxon fleet endeavoured to follow him through the tangled maze of land-locked channels. On every island or promontory, indeed, along all the East Anglian and East Saxon coast, the heathen pirates have left their memories thickly clustered in local names and earthworks and customs, while sometimes the very surnames of the inhabitants themselves still preserve a distinctive ancient Scandinavian ring. All these low spits and headlands of the Thames, as Canon Isaac Taylor has pointed out, bear Norse designations, such as Foreness, Shellness, Whiteness, Foulness, and Wrabness; a little peninsular colony on the tongue of land by the Orwell walled off the Soken headland, whence Walton-le-Soken still calls itself by its second name; and Danesey Hundred must have formed another intrusive settlement of the seafaring Scandinavian folk amongst their agricultural East Saxon enemies. At a still later date, during the disastrous reign of Ethelred the Redeless, a Norwegian host under Olaf Tryggvesson landed at Maldon itself, where King Edward the Elder had built one of those gr at border fortresses by which he overawed the turbulent Danish kingdom of East Anglia, and were met by a Saxon reeve named Brihtnoth, whose gallant defence has been commemorated in one of the most stirring and poetical ballads handed down to us by our rough early English ancestors. The joy of the fight shines fierce in every line, and the short lilt of the rude alliterative verses seems to foreshadow the later ringing battle-songs of Campbell and Tennyson. Even the Danes themselves, with their candid love of fairness and sincere respect for a tough fighter, declared that Brihtnoth had given them "harder hand play" than any they had ever yet enjoyed on English soil; and though the "heathen men" were victorious, they were obliged to withdraw without plundering Maldon, and to content themselves with the empty trophy of the hero Brihtnoth's head.

We spend the night in the creeks of the Blackwater, by the fleet or back current that separates the sea from the marshy main, where the watchmen of the oyster ground, thinking we must have come to steal the oyster spat from the banks, row round us all night long to prevent mischief. Next day, leaving them uninstructed, we continue our course over

Danesey Flats and the Eastern Maplin, till at midday we see before us the distant low woods which mark the famous point of Shoeburyness. The loud boom of artillery practice warns us that the big guns are trying their range at targets planted seemingly in the midst of the sea, but at a depth fully uncovered at low water. The advantage of this arrangement lies in the fact that the shots simply bury themselves in the mud, and can be dug out again for future use when the tide recedes. The earthwork on the hither side of Shoeburyness doubtless preserves the memory of the Danes from whom the Ness took its title; perhaps it is the very "work" which the famous pirate Hasten, King Alfred's chief adversary in his later days, wrought here after he had been driven from his earlier fastness at Benfleet. The "works" of our modern defenders show far less picturesque from the waterside, for they only consist of dreary barracks and iron targets riddled through and through with big shot. Shoebury shows its alluvial origin at once in its very profile; all these long low elbows projecting into the sea in front of marshy wastes and girt round the coast by dykes of shingle, like Shoeburyness, Orfordness, and Dungeness—mark the significant Danish termination throughout—are invariably of very recent date, and owe their existence entirely to the silt of modern rivers.

Rounding Shoeburyness, the long straight line of Southend pier bursts at once in gaunt magnificence upon our saddened vision. At low tide Southend-on-the-Mud displays the full extent of its unrivalled ooze-flats to the greatest possible æsthetic advantage. Southend-on-Sea the inhabitants proudly call it, requesting you at the same time to taste a little of the water below the pier in order to satisfy yourself that it is really salt, and that they can prove a good and lawful claim to the adoption of that harmless laudatory suffix. But probably no town in the whole kingdom, save only that Somersetshire watering-place indifferently known as Weston-super-Mare or Weston-super-Mud, can show so fine an expanse of pure grey shining mud-flat as this ambitious and lively little Essex Margate. The great features of Southend, indeed, are first the mud, and second the pier that has been cunningly invented to get across it. Excursion steamers call here from London, and as it would be awkward for them to land their passengers knee-deep in the beautiful soft brown slush of Southend, the rich material

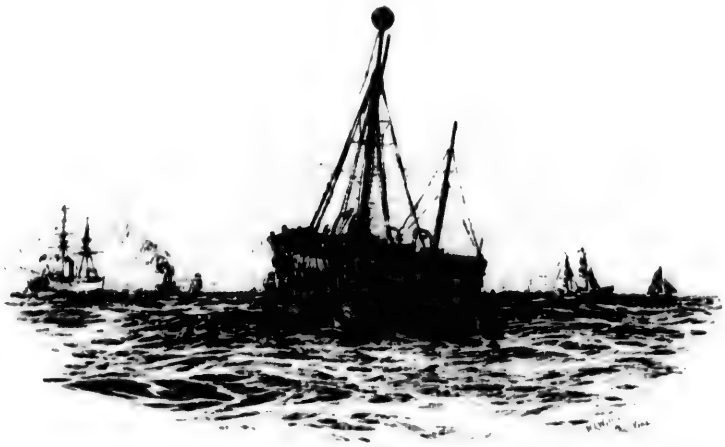
of a future continent (let us give the noble silt its due), the pier has been devised to bridge over the space between the solid shore and the open sea at a proper depth for steamers to approach it. It is one of the longest and finest in England, stretching for a mile and a quarter out into the estuary, and forming, according to the taste and fancy of the tourist, at high water a magnificent marine promenade, or at ebb-tide a splendid study of rich and delicate brown river-mud. The wooden piles have suffered much from the ravages of the teredo or ship-worm, who has proved himself a serious nuisance along the entire course of the Lower Thames; and, to check his boring, the wood has been saturated with creosote, which ought to prove a sufficient deterrent even to the most industrious and persistent of molluscs. Southend town itself may be regarded as a convenient adjunct of Southend pier. It stands in part on a low earthen cliff, with a fine view over the vessels in the offing; and the population consists mainly of landladies, boatmen, donkey boys, and other common objects of the seaside, consumed with a laudable desire to earn an honest livelihood, and resolved to effect that admirable purpose by the profitable exploitation of the passing tourist.

Just past the wooden end of Southend pier, a grey inlet stretches north-westward toward the mouldering ruins of Hadleigh Castle (immortalised by Constable), on the low hill in the middle distance. Leigh Creek they call this sand-encumbered fiord, divided into two deep branches by shoals and mud-banks, known respectively as Leigh Ray and Hadleigh Ray. Up the first-named branch lies the busy village of Leigh or Lee, one of the most conspicuous little fishing centres of the entire Thames estuary. Up and down the river everywhere the Leigh shrimper is a familiar and most noticeable personage, pushing his way boldly in his pert small craft in and out among the laden merchantmen and puffing steamers that clog and cumber the crowded middle channel. A fire burns perpetually on deck, and above it a huge cauldron boils and seethes in ceaseless energy. Every now and then a man stirs up the flame with a long iron poker, and black wreaths of smoke, mixed with big sparks that fly in the wind, rise volubly from the deck and take, if possible, the nearest short-cut to a neighbouring powder-ship, moored with her red flag flying, conveniently to leeward. The trawl-net for shrimps drags continually behind, and is drawn in and emptied

from moment to moment. The boys pick out the jelly-fish, which form the staple of its contents, and fling them hastily overboard (one kind stings, and had best be handled gingerly), but the shrimps they throw into baskets, and pour at once into the big simmering, steaming cauldron. Thus the poor beasts themselves have no long time to wait between trial and execution, while the human public derives the advantage of perfectly fresh-boiled shrimps for its middle-class tea-table. Their end is an easy one, probably, for the water is kept fiercely boiling all the time, and the first shock no doubt kills them instantaneously. There are few more interesting sights on the Lower Thames than these Leigh shrimpers, with their fire and their boiler on the open deck, and their whole busy throng plying the ancestral trade unabashed before the eyes of the entire river, wholly unconcerned by the larger drama whose acts unfold themselves perpetually all around in manifold variety. Ships may come and ships may go, but the Leigh shrimper goes on quietly shrimping for ever in the very broadway of the world's commerce.

It is getting a trifle dusky as we turn back from Leigh towards the open river, and we half make up our minds to take advantage of the ebb, for we have still to run back once more along the Kentish side, and explore the rotten crumbling coasts and girdling inlets of the Isle of Sheppey. A night run, however, would be wearisome after our long day; so we decide at last to anchor in Leigh Ray, and spend the succeeding morning in cutting across the open roadway. An uneventful rainy day carries us safe along the wide Fairway Channel, and over the Spile to the Sheppey sandbanks; and there once more we come to our moorings by a low headland above whose mud-cliffs a small square church caps the summit of a little rounded hillock. It is dark and raining hard when we get there, but the lights of Whitstable glimmer faintly across the Columbine as we cast our anchor, and the Nore and Mouse lightships enable us to take our bearings with sufficient accuracy for a light craft like the *Puffin*, which fears nothing except a few hours' detention by the ebbing tide. The chart gives us half a fathom here—not much, but quite enough for our present purpose. So we lie by quietly for the night, and hope for better weather to-morrow morning.

And oh, how one sleeps after a day of roughing it! It's one of the delights of yachting that one gets such wonderfully sound rest under such unpromising circumstances. The yawl may be bumping up and down on a tide-beaten sandbank, or tossing about before an angry nor'-easter, but, if only you're tired enough, you slumber as peacefully as on a bed of down in an Aladdin's palace of Oriental luxury: that is to say, if sea-sickness permits you; though it's wonderful how even that worst of all the minor evils flesh is heir to is mitigated or dispelled by the simple remedy of having something to do. One is far less likely to suffer from it when one has to manage the navigation or help in the cooking. A turn at the ropes does all the good in the world. It's the lazy passenger that *mal-de-mer* seizes in return for his idleness.



THE NORE LIGHTSHIP.

QUEENBOROUGH SWAN

CHAPTER V.

SHEPPEY AND THE NORE

WE wake at six o'clock with an uncomfortable suspicion of rain overhead, which further investigation proves to be not unfounded—for the moment, at least. A moist and muggy morning off the slippery anchorage of Warden Point on the Isle of Sheppey ushers in a damp, chilly, and characteristically vague Lower Thames day. The high red cliffs and downs behind grow fainter and fainter every minute through the grey haze, as though somebody had taken a big brush and gone on softening and softening away at the outline, till at last there was no drawing at all left, but merely an indistinct blur of bluish-white colour. Still, breakfast will mitigate greater woes than a Thames fog, mixed with a gentle sea drizzle; and as we sit on the winch, eating our savoury bacon and drinking our cup of strong black tea, we are rewarded for our philosophy by seeing the fog lift slowly for a while and disclose for us the long monotonous sea front of the ancient and decaying Isle of Sheppey.

It is not a beautiful bit of country from the point of view of the general landscape, this green Isle of Sheep off which we lie anchored, with its high clay cliffs and flat sandbanks; nor is Warden Point itself exactly what a

conscientious speaker could truly describe as a bold and commanding precipitous headland. Yet it has a peculiar interest of its own from its underlying geological structure; for the glistening clay of which the bank is composed contains an unusually large number of rare fossils, brought down in early tertiary times and deposited here by some mighty river which flowed through a far wider and longer stretch of continental land than its puny and degenerate modern representative, the existing Thames. The group of small houses near the end of the Point bears the strictly appropriate name of Mud Row, and gives shelter to a few isolated quarrymen who gather pyrites for dye-works, or grub up septaria for the manufacture of Parker's cement, in the cliffs themselves or among the fallen rubbish that lies encumbering the beach below. They also usually keep for sale a goodly collection of twigs and fruits belonging to the tropical palms and extinct screw-pines that once grew upon the luxuriant bank of the forgotten tertiary river, the commonest being a sort of date fossilised into iron pyrites, and known to the quarrymen with the usual glib identification of unscientific minds as "petrified figs." By far the most interesting, however, of the curious remains discovered in the London clay of the Sheppey cliffs are the scanty relics of the toothed bird, bearing on its bill projections like a crocodile's teeth, and forming an intermediate stage between the fierce-jawed swimming monsters, half-bird and half-lizard, of the American chalk on the one hand, and the familiar ostriches and emus of the modern world on the other.

The sandbank that bounds the whole northern shore of the Isle of Sheppey on either side of Warden Point is the famous Cant, the probable remnant of an ancient land surface which formerly stretched out to sea for three or four miles from the modern coast-line; for even now the shore of Sheppey is rapidly wasting before the ceaseless onslaughts of the waves, and every high tide after heavy rains brings down another bit or two of the crumbling cliff to join the mass of fallen débris at its assaulted base. We run over the shallow water—hardly a fathom deep in many places—up toward Sheerness, whose murky houses and big ugly forts show indistinctly through the soft weather as we turn the corner by the Garrison buildings into the wide yawning mouth of the Medway. The famous "marriage of

the Thames and Medway" takes place at Sheerness. "Sheernasty" the sailors call it in their blunt dialect, and indeed it must be confessed that the capital of Sheppey, in spite of Spenser, cannot be considered a poetical town; for it has as few attractions of a picturesque description as the rest of the rather dreary and desolate island upon which it stands. It has but one *raison d'être*—the docks and military works, first placed here when the Dutch under De Ruyter sailed up the Medway and bearded an English fleet in English waters with perfect impunity. Still, even Sheerness must needs try to make itself into a fashionable watering-place in these latter days, and it has accordingly devised a new quarter to the east, which blazons itself forth under the delightfully incongruous title of the Marina. Great oyster beds stretch in front of the north shore and also down the West Swale, which divides the Isle of Sheppey from the opposite reaches of the Kentish coast.

The West Swale deserves a passing hour's exploration from the pilgrim of the tidal river as a mercantile highway. In ancient times this Swale, like the Wantsum at Thanet, was regularly used as the chief navigable channel of the Thames in this portion of its course, and by sailing up it ships avoided all the shallows and sandbanks which now bar the progress of the main stream from the Nore as far down as the Pan Sand. And just as Thanet was the earliest landing-place of the English in Britain, so the Swale gave the earliest opportunity for their natural successors, the Scandinavian pirates; the short entry in the English Chronicle, "Here heathen men first wintered over in Sheppey," marking the beginning of that long onslaught of the Dane upon the hard-fought soil of Wessex. To this day the Swale is still navigable, but only for vessels of small burden and barges bound for Sittingbourn or Faversham. Even so, it is a lively little river enough; the oyster fishers have marked it out for their own, and many small craft ply up and down busily over its shallow surface, engaged in the local trade of carrying produce from the endless marshes that hem it in on either side. At the Sheerness mouth stands the decayed and till lately forgotten town of Queenborough, an older place than Sheerness, but one that had suffered a long eclipse until a short time since it was made into the chief starting-point for the Flushing steamers.

Old Southend Pier.

Innumerable long winding creeks, running off in every direction, like fingers from a hand, penetrate the low marshlands around this part of the Swale and the Medway. The mudflats between swarm with gulls and other sea birds, whose sway remains here quite undisputed by the strong hand of intrusive and pervasive man. Shining banks of pure ooze alternate everywhere with low wrack and tall walls of salt-marsh vegetation; but nowhere does a single house appear among the desolate insulated deserts, or a sign of human life greet the eye upon the level and interminable marshes. Only in the mid-channel, where the oyster boats are busy at work dredging up their take, is there any trace of man's activity; the land itself is given over either to a few scanty sheep or to nothing else save russet weeds and rank seaside reedy grasses.

Our course back again into the main channel, after exploring all the queer uncanny recesses of the West Swale and the lanes of Sheerness, perfumed with mingled odours of fish and tar, leads us round once more (as the tide begins to flow) over the shallow waters that cover the great expanse of the Cant sandbank. Sheerness garrison fades slowly behind us in the fog, and a more famous spot in the history of the tidal river calls us on with irresistible eloquence to visit its watery and indefinite local habitation. We are coming, in fact, to the best-known sea-mark of our whole journey. North of the Cant, on a long projecting sandspit which juts out into the mid-space between the main channels of the Thames and the Medway, the Nore lightship, in solitary isolation, looms up dimly through the misty air, a great mass of deep red colour rising and falling ceaselessly with monotonous motion on the changeful tide. As we near her, tide is just this moment in the very act of turning, for her bow, which pointed up stream a few minutes since, has now swung round with the flood and points downwards again. While the great ship rides at anchor in this unvaried daily routine, by the very gateway of the narrower Thames, the ocean-going steamers and big merchantmen and saucy yachts and long barges all pass by her, up and down, day and night, all the year round, a ceaseless living panorama of work and action; but the Nore lightship moves only four times in the twenty-four hours, just the length of her own cables, as she twists inanimately from one side to the other with every rising or

ebbing tide. A dreary sort of existence truly, in the midst of so much shipping that perpetually comes and goes on every side; a dreary time for a seafaring man accustomed to the free life of the open sea, to be chained there helplessly from week to week in utter listlessness while everybody else is running to and fro in every direction over the whole face of the boundless waters. We sail close to the heavy red hull, on the north side of her, and drop our anchor down, in some four fathoms of water, on the shoal tongue of sand, to make a sketch of the famous lightship from a convenient and picturesque distance.

The river just here is very shallow indeed, though there is a depth of from eight to ten fathoms in the main commercial highways on either side of us, along the Thames and the Medway—for we have chosen our moorings on the exact point of the long sandspit which gives its name to this familiar spot—the Nore. In good old English, the word Nore is a form of Nose, and is equivalent to the "ness" of Orfordness, and to the Naze by the port of Harwich. Sometimes, indeed, the two words are used together quite interchangeably, as in the name of that great chalk promontory which makes so conspicuous an object in the view of the Dorsetshire coast from Portland Roads, and which is known indifferently as White Nore or White Nose. Even inland the same expressive title sometimes clings to a projecting hill or peak, as in the Nore that overhangs Gilbert White's Selborne—"a noble chalk promontory," as the idyllic naturalist well describes it—and the Nower that looks down from an isolated height upon the wooded basin of the "Mousling Mole" at Dorking. But to the unaccustomed eye of the landsman, it would seem at first sight as though there were no perceptible nose or ness or promontory of any sort at this the most familiar and world-famous of all the Nores in the whole of England; it is not until one turns to the Admiralty charts, or goes over the ground with the discriminating eye of a practised sailor, that one begins to perceive the sunken projection or under-water cape from which the place derives its nickname. The Nore Sand is, in fact, a submarine (or perhaps one ought rather to say sub-fluviatile) prolongation of the high land that forms the backbone of the Hundred of Hoo, and afterwards subsides into the level marshes of the Isle of Grain. It juts out in a straight line from the end of that dreary

island into the middle space between the Thames and the Medway, and for about two miles from the land it dries at low tide, with the exception of a small channel called by the expressive name of the Jenkin Swatchway. At the end of this visible and tangible bank a hidden shoal runs still further seaward for about a mile and a half, and just at its very point, the nose or tip where it falls over into the deeper water, the Nore lightship stands moored at the actual mouth of the great river, to guide with its lanterns all the shipping of the world safely in and out of the Port of London.

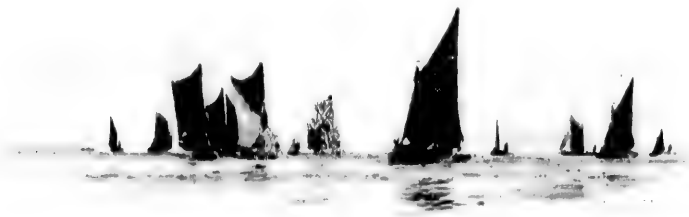
For more than a century and a half some lightship or other has been moored immovable upon this tongue of sand, and pointed out the way up the river to every ship that entered the straggling mouth of the great Thames from the high seas. The first lineal predecessor of the present ship was placed here in 1731 by a Mr. Hamblin, a private person who had obtained a patent for "an improved distinguishable light," and tried it at the Nore on a vessel appropriately christened the *Experiment*. His experiment proved thoroughly successful, and the lightship was soon afterwards placed under the control of the Trinity House. The present vessel, its modern representative, is a large and solid block of a ship, painted the ordinary deep red of the Trinity House lightships, and with the word "Nore" in large and conspicuous white letters displayed ostentatiously on either broadside. A picturesque red ball or cage of bars is fixed as a further distinction at the mast-head; by night, they hoist below it the lantern, which shows a revolving light with a bright flash at intervals of thirty seconds, and visible for a distance of ten miles. The nautical marks for the ship are Minster Church, on the high grounds which we have already passed, bearing S.S.W., and the Garrison Point at Sheerness, west by south and three miles' distance.

The lightship men come to the side with languid interest to see what can be taking us on a comparatively clear day right into the middle of the doubtful shallows; but having satisfied themselves through their binoculars that we are only that particular class of very uncommercial travellers who paint pictures, they lounge off again listlessly to their monotonous duties, with a sailor's true contempt for the foolish practice of daubing in colours, other than tattooing. It must be quite a relief for them, poor fellows, to

see a ship getting into danger among these intricate swatchways and sandbanks, for then they have the opportunity for performing the one solitary active function of their whole existence, by firing off a gun to warn her of her peril. While the sketchers are engaged in sketching, the third person of the party puts out the boat and tries to pull against wind and tide alongside the lightship. The good fellows aboard are always glad of a chat with somebody from ashore, and still more for a peep at the day's paper. So the idle man collects all the loose readables he can find on board the *Puffin*, and does his best to pull up slowly with clumsy oars lopping in the lumpy sea towards the great red hull that rises and falls tumultuously before him. Very big and red she looks indeed from so low in the water, a huge shapeless russet monster tossing about aimlessly on every wave; and the men aboard now crowd to the side at the rare chance of a stray caller, and shout out inaudible directions as to the best way to get the better of the rising flood. Alas! the tide sets too strong now for a single pair of arms to make any headway against it, and even to get back to the *Puffin* is a long and difficult piece of rowing. In the end an ignominious rope has to be paid out astern with a piece of wood tied to it for a float, and with this stray aid the disappointed searcher after details of life on a lightship has to drag himself back to the yawl, and for the moment to give up his quest for fresh information.

Running up over the Nore Sand, when the sketches are completed, a little aside from the central channel, we come in about two miles to the Nore buoy, a big bobbing object painted black and white in vertical stripes, and marking the extreme edge of the dangerous sandbank in this direction. Some two miles more, sailing lightly before the tide, brings us on to a second bobbing mass, the Jenkin buoy, distinguished from its next neighbour by being painted black and white in alternate chequers, and serving to show the entrance to the Jenkin Swatchway, which trends round south-eastward on our left, so as to form a short cut for vessels of small burden on the frequented track between the Thames and the Medway. They are quaint out-of-the-way places, these back lanes or irregular by-paths of coastwise navigation, affected only by light shrimpers or heavy barges; and the Jenkin Swatchway is an excellent example of the whole curious belated

class. As we sail down it, heading lazily for the Medway, the vast dry expanse of the Nore Sand rises on our left like some huge whale's back in a long low curve from the surface of the water; on our right another long and narrow island of sand, the Jenkin, also covered at high tide, though dry at the ebb, bounds the slender middle channel with its shelving



THE JENKIN SWATCHWAY.

sides; while further on, the Grain Spit, a bank of mud and sand projecting from the Isle of Grain into the united estuary of the two rivers, almost stops the view towards the Kentish coast. Down the narrow sea-lane left between these capes and islands of shifting sand, a number of barges, with warm brown sails set to the breeze, and quaint devices painted on their main-sails, are hurrying with such speed as they can best command toward the port of Rochester. A strange and dreary picture altogether, yet wonderfully characteristic of the Thames estuary, with its endless line of dry sandbank, and its all-pervading life of ubiquitous shipping.

There are few ships more admirably fitted for their own particular niche in the economy of the sea than these same commodious and handy but much-despised barges. In their chosen line they have very nearly reached perfection. They can go anywhere and do anything. Here on the lower river, crowded with steamers and big ships, all crossing and recrossing one another's course on port or starboard tack the livelong day, the despised barges sail along unconcernedly at their own even pace, little regarded by anybody else, yet always managing to come out of it all quite uninjured. On the upper river they run on, regardless of obstacles or bridges till they

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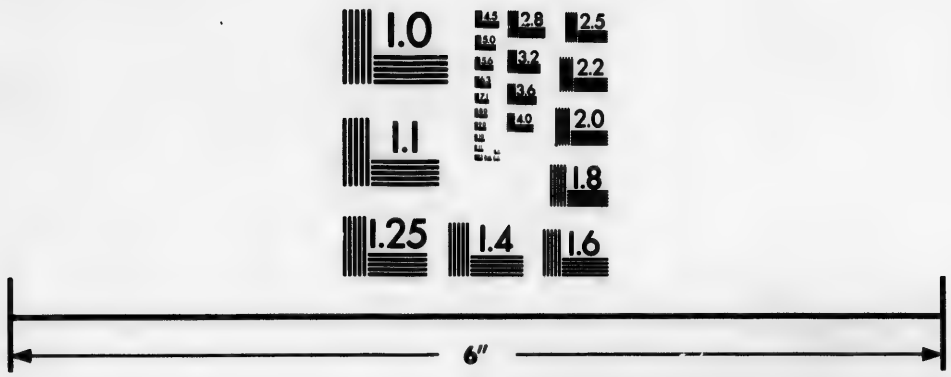
TEST TARGET (MT-3)



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are close upon the very piers, and then, at a moment's notice, down goes the mast to pass under the arches, and as soon as the bridge is fairly passed the crew heave up the heavy gear again with the groaning windlass, while the barge sails on upon her way once more, apparently none the worse for her sudden collapse, though her mast stands at an angle of 45° and her rigging and sails, a flapping mass of tangled confusion, cover and encumber the whole vessel. As for picturesqueness, of course there is nothing like them on the whole river; their brick-red or dark brown sails and low black hulls seem as if they had been invented on purpose just to give a little bright colour and effective contrast for the marine painter's artistic necessities. Of late years, too, the barges have begun to do a little on their own account, with the conscious desire to improve their own personal appearance. The much-talked-of "progress of decorative art" has filtered down even to the level of barges. Some of them add a dark brown top-sail to their native rusty red; others stick on a few stripes of colour like Mediterranean lateens, or bear a crest or device on their sails like the one that is just now heading towards us down the central lane of the Jenkin Swatchway. She is the *Invicta* of Rochester, and she carries the ancient Kentish emblem of the White Horse boldly emblazoned on her chocolate-coloured canvas. What a curious link with the past, that old heathen Teutonic token thus proudly displayed upon the dark sails of a modern everyday Kentish barge! For the White Horse was the banner of the Jutes and Angles in their primitive home by the mouths of the Elbe, as it still is of the Hanover and Brunswick whence their long-ships sailed. It was brought to Kent in the three keels of Hengist and Horsa, whose names are but old English for the stallion and the mare; and it has remained the symbol of Kent from that day onward to this. Wherever the intrusive Angle or Saxon set foot in Britain, the White Horse of the Sleswick marshlands formed the visible memento of his conquest; and even now the White Horses, cut into the chalk downs of Wantage and Westbury, mark the various stages of his triumphal advance against the ever-retreating Western Britons. As to the name Invicta, that is the immemorial motto underneath the Kentish coat-of-arms to this day; and when one remembers that Rochester was long the capital of the West Kent kingdom, and is

still the cathedral city of the West Kentish bishop and the site of the great West Kentish castle, there is a peculiar fitness in name and emblem, which throws a halo of poetry even around that very prosaic but not unpictorial object, a common coasting-barge.

The low flat land to westward, the Isle of Grain, though now an island only in name, since the marshes at its western end have been drained and reclaimed, was long one of the most lonely and isolated spots along the whole front of the great river. Indeed, the contrast between the busy waterway in midstream and the deserted marshy flats and islands that bound it on either side is often extremely curious and weird in its sudden transitions. The river seems part of the full tide of bustling modern commercial life; but the swampy islets and peninsulas on its bank, separated from the main lines of internal roads and communications by long and winding creeks or serpentine bays, and often approached only by row-boats which land the visitor on a muddy beach knee-deep in ooze and slush, seem as though they had been utterly left behind and stranded by the advance of the outer world and given over only to a few dazed-looking sheep and mewing sea-birds. Quite lately, however, the South Eastern Railway has driven a fresh line from Gravesend, through the neglected and forgotten Hundred of Hoo, to the extreme point of the Isle of Grain, where it has opened a brand-new station and harbour, dignified with the too loyal name of Port Victoria. A steam ferry makes the passage across the mouth of the Medway, here about a mile and a half wide, to the opposite piers of Sheerness. Still, even since the snorting engine has invaded its marshy flats, the Isle of Grain retains a very old-world and sleepy look; innumerable sheep, huddling together from the sea breeze, graze everywhere upon its rich salt-marsh pasturage, and the few houses that give shelter to farmers and shepherds are mainly scattered about singly among the low-lying but prosperous levels. The only conspicuous building in the island is the little poverty-stricken church of St. James's, standing all by itself on a slight patch of rising ground, in the very teeth of the east wind, and pointed out to strangers as a curiosity because its exposed situation compels it to have the unusual protection of shutters to its windows. A round martello tower looms picturesquely out to sea upon an island of sandbank, and a fort on

the beach helps to defend the entrance of the Thames and Medway from any future Van Tromps or De Ruyters. Cold Harbour Barn, a well-known sea-mark on the north end of the island, keeps in its name a curious solitary relic of an otherwise forgotten Roman occupation. The title of Cold Harbour, given in many parts of England to lonely farmhouses or cottages, generally marks the site of an old and ruined Roman villa. The mediæval traveller, journeying along the great trunk lines of the Roman roads, found shelter in the bare and blackened walls of the Italian colonists, burnt and destroyed by the heathen Saxon invaders; but he had to light his own fire and cook the provisions he had brought along with him, so he gave to these inhospitable picnicking hostelries the chilly name of Cold Harbours.

The long meandering inlet that nearly severs the Isle of Grain from the mainland of the Hundred of Hoo is known as Yantlet Creek; and at its mouth, on the eastern side, stands London Stone, one of the marks which for many centuries bounded the jurisdiction of the Lord Mayor of London as "conservator of the river Thames." Between Leigh and Southend, on the opposite or Essex coast, exactly facing this Kentish mark, stands another similar obelisk, also known as London Stone, but more popularly called the Crowstone; and a straight line drawn between them was the furthest outward limit of the mayor's conservatorship from the earliest times till 1859. A third London Stone stands near the mouldering ruins of Cockham Fort on the Medway, and bears two inscriptions: on the east side, "God Preserve the City of London, 1204," and on the north, "Brass Crosby, Esq., Lord Mayor, 1771." These old landmarks are interesting in their way, as showing how fully the citizens of London recognised the importance of the river Thames as the highway which gave their city its national and commercial importance. Indeed, from the days of the early Port-reeves onward—that was the significant name of the Saxon officer who preceded the Lord Mayors of Plantagenet times—till the age of railways, that clear truth was never for a moment forgotten; it is in very modern times only that people have begun to overlook the once obvious fact that the very existence of London town is wholly due to Thames river.

The Thames conservancy formed part of the duties or privileges of the Mayor of London, or his predecessor the Port-reeve, at least from the days

Sheerness.

of William the Conqueror onward. By charter of Henry VII., printed by Caxton, the Lord Mayor and Commonalty were definitely appointed Bailiffs or Conservators of the Thames from Staines Bridge to Yantlet Creek, as well as of the river Medway. These powers they exercised until 1859, when the Thames Conservancy Board was constituted as a compromise between the City of London and the Crown (the latter having laid claim to the space between tide-marks on the foreshore of the river), and the boundaries of the new power remained the same, from Staines to a line drawn between Yantlet Creek and the Crowstone opposite Canvey Island. A later Act extended the western limit from Staines to Cricklade on the upper river.

At the outlet of Yantlet Creek, a shallow sandbank, named Yantlet Flats, runs out into the river for a mile and a half, and from its midst used once to rise another of the desolate coast eyots, known as Yantlet Island, a festering mass of rich brown mud and luxuriant salt-marsh vegetation, now entirely washed away. An old mortar-boat, with a house built like Peggoty's in her deserted forecastle and on her poor old poop, has been turned here into a coastguard station, and hauled with her nose up in the tall marsh grass. All around these long creeks and backwaters of the lower river, indeed, the aspect of living nature is everywhere very peculiar and extraordinary, redolent as it were of the salt brine that blows with the prevalent east wind from the German Ocean over the low flat expanses of marshy meadow and misty swamp. Even the grasses are special wiry seaside types; the weeds are congeners of those dusty-looking kalis that overgrow the sandy outskirts of the African or Syrian deserts; and the world at large wears a grey, efflorescent, saline character, found nowhere else save on these curious patches of marine moorland, or on the long fleets and haafs and lagoons of the Southern Baltic or the Arctic seas. It is almost impossible to believe we are standing so close to the main line of modern British commerce and communications; these winding arms and lonely eyots are so utterly and completely isolated that they seem to belong to some other and totally different order of things from the age of steamships and telegraphs and electric lights. They might almost be patches of Finnish tundra or of Siberian morass, tumbled down unconsciously and incontinently

beside the busy highway of the world's trade. Here, as before, the contrast between the ceaseless life and activity of the great river channel, and the utter lost lonesomeness of its surrounding side-cuts, is perfectly sudden and almost appalling in its vivid singularity. Indeed, so very remote and inaccessible are many of the islets embraced by re-entrant arms of the sea around the West Swale and the junction of the Thames and Medway, that it is said men in barges actually go down and cut the hay on some of them without any authorisation from the owners, and yet with perfect impunity, because there is absolutely nobody there to interfere with or in any way prevent them. Incredible as such a fact sounds in modern England to those who have never cruised among the intricate minor waterways of the Lower Thames basin, it is perfectly comprehensible to everyone who has ever coasted in and out of their long and endless divergent channels.

In its own way the salt-marsh vegetation forms one of the most exquisite and characteristic features of the tidal Thames. It is not every eye, to be sure, that can see beauty in these great shining acrid flats of swamp and mudbank. To the popular and unregenerate mind at least, they are decidedly bare, dreary, wearisome, and repellent. And yet, if one has the trick to see it, there is genuine beauty of a very high and distinct order in the long level stretches of ooze and marshland that bound the monotonous tidal reaches of the Lower Thames. Great dykes of soft brown mud, opalescent and glittering in the sunshine, intersect the plots of rank vegetation every here and there with their interlacing arms; and by their side, if you look closely into the mass, a wonderful beautiful salt-marsh flora grows luxuriantly in profuse wealth of lush green, or pale hoary white, or delicate blue, or brilliant crimson. On the very edge of the dykes the succulent leaves and tall stems of the sea-aster rise like a wall above the sheer precipice of malodorous ooze; above, its flowers expand in big trusses of lilac bloom, rayed like a Michaelmas daisy for the most part, but sometimes (and especially on these Thames-side marsh islands) with the lilac rays entirely suppressed, so that the whole blossom seems reduced to a mere ragged bundle of yellow disk-florets, like a gigantic groundsel. By its side the golden sea-wormwood, prettiest of our English artemisias, spreads its

pale powdery leaves, speckled with flour like those of sage or purslane, and scents the neighbourhood with its strong pungent aromatic perfume. Within the islands a few sheep, like those which produce the famous *pré salé* mutton of the Calvados, browse lazily on the coarse maritime grasses and stringy weeds that alone can thrive under the influence of the brine-laden breeze. Here and there, in a depression near the tide-filled ditches, patches of beautiful white scurvy-grass expand their lovely snowy petals—for if ever a beautiful plant had cause to complain of its common English name, scurvy-grass is that ill-used and unoffending species. It got its popular title from utilitarian sailors, who have found it a good specific against scurvy in Arctic or high northern voyages, because it grows in colder climates than almost any other herb which can be eaten by man as a salad or vegetable; but its brilliant masses of milk-white blossom surely deserve a better and an apter popular name. Then there is the rich sea-pink, the dainty maritime bladder-campion, the crimson blite, and the exquisite glasswort, forming all together such a group of coastwise blossoming plants as for wealth of colour and variety of interest cannot perhaps be equalled in the whole range of the British Islands. To those who have not eyes to see, the tidal islets may be bare and monotonous indeed, but to the trained and sympathetic vision both of the botanist and the artist they are wonderful untrammelled gardens of the strangest and rarest beautiful gifts from the all-yielding, untutored, harvestless sea.

SEA REACH

CHAPTER VI.

SEA REACH

YANTLET CREEK makes a convenient spot to lie by for a night, out of range of discomfort from the heavy swell that runs up the funnel-shaped channel of Sea Reach, as the narrower stretch of river is called between Mucking and the Nore lightship, its name being given, of course, from the point of view of an outward-bound vessel, which here for the first time as it is towed on its ignominious course down stream hits upon anything that for breadth and roominess can be fairly described as the sea, even by the utmost stretch of maritime courtesy. Hard by, a barge is loading with cockle-shells for gravelling the paths of the London parks. The keen clear wind blows straight from the open German Ocean across the salt marshes, and the joy of the sea meets us boldly in the face as we turn our bow eastward again round the spot where once stood Yantlet Island. So we lie up here, nothing loth, and turning in to sleep, under shelter of the low bank formed to eastward by the mudflats of the Isle of Grain, we start next morning to explore the long straight channel that opens right in front of us in dim perspective, and to coast among the lazy creeks of the opposite Essex shore, around the endless banks of Holy Haven, and the meandering dykes of Canvey Island.

The coast to westward, when we dropped anchor last night inside the

natural breakwater of Yantlet Island, consisted of a long and broad dry bank, the Blythe Sand, reaching half-way across the river in its gradual slope, and marked along its entire length by a series of equidistant big black buoys. But when we get out into the main channel again this morning, the tide is high and the river has broadened out once more to twice its original width, the whole of the Blythe being now covered from end to end by the advancing water. Indeed, the tricks that the moon plays us in this matter among the shoals and ooses of the Lower Thames are really quite surprising at times, for the tide so utterly alters the look of things in general that one feels almost like Baron Munchausen on the famous occasion when he went to sleep on a Russian plain after tying his horse to a twig in the snow, and woke up in the midst of a sudden thaw next morning to find himself in the street of a village and his faithful steed suspended high overhead by the bridle from the very vane of the neighbouring steeple. Even so, one may turn into one's bunk in the midst of a narrow creek, girt round by high barrier walls of mud which spread out fingerwise on every side into intricate divisions, and awake next day floating in the exact centre of a seemingly boundless and placid lake, on whose distant margin, some five miles off a dim suspicion of low grassy banks can just be detected by the experienced eye. The effect of these sudden transitions is decidedly perplexing, and a man needs to know the side channels of the Thames by long acquaintance before he can confidently trust himself to find his way about them by the eye alone without the needful assistance of charts and sailing directions. What seems at one time a tortuous river, winding in and out in continuous esses between high mud-banks, seems at another a broad mere of open water dotted over here and there with humpy sandy eyots, or, still later, assumes the guise of a stormy sea, unbroken anywhere save by a few dancing buoys that mark the sites of the now engulfed and invisible islands. It is one continuous transformation scene of nature's own making, shifting at least four times over in the twenty-four hours.

The southern or Kentish side of Sea Reach is formed by the coast-line of that famous but till lately almost forgotten region, the Hundred of Hoo. Seen from the river, this desolate out-of-the-world tract divides itself

naturally into three layers or horizons, each one lying behind the other in receding perspective, and all fading through the dim driving mist of the Thames estuary into a single murky and indistinct picture. In the foreground the glistening and shimmering ridge of the Blythe Sand rises high and dry from the main channel at low tide, and stretches with little interruption for ten or twelve miles along the shore from opposite Mucking to beyond the mouth of Yantlet Creek. Abreast of Holy Haven, the bank extends half-way across the whole river, so that the visible breadth of the stream is immensely narrowed at low water, and doubled again with wonderful rapidity at half-tide. The four black buoys at equal distances mark the northern limit of the sandbank and keep large vessels to the navigable channel by the Essex coast. Over the edge of the Blythe Sands the second plane begins—a low flat district, known as the Cowling Marshes, and girdling with its swamps all this portion of the Kentish coast, from Gravesend to the Isle of Grain. Within and beyond these ague-breeding flats, again, the chalk-downs of Hoo dimly rise against the grey sky-line, crowned by occasional steeples, towers, farmhouses, and big trees, every one of which is a well-known sea-mark for ships beating painfully up or down the central channel with endless tacks off the edge of the tide.

The Hundred of Hoo is a low peninsula or tongue of land dividing for some distance the estuaries of the Thames and the Medway and formed by a subsiding backbone of chalk, with a broad hem of marsh and sandbank. The chalk-hills are a dying offshoot from the main ridge of the North Downs, and the peninsula as a whole is prolonged first in the marshy levels of the Isle of Grain and afterwards beneath the sea at high tide, in the endless succession of sandbanks which finally terminate in the long and narrow submerged promontory of the Nore. It is a desolate dreary-looking spot, whose characteristics are well described in the old local rhyme :—

"He that rides into the Hundred of Hoo
Finds fever and ague and dirt enoo."

Till very recently, indeed, the only way to get into the Hundred of Hoo was by the aboriginal method of riding or driving over very muddy roads of primitive construction; but of late the railway to Port Victoria

has cut through the heart of the district, and Hoo is now wakened from its ancient isolation to find itself part of the new main road to Sheerness and the Flushing steamers.

As we coast slowly along the flat shore—our yawl can lie in close over the Blythe Sand with the present tidal depth of water—the various landmarks of this isolated tract rise one after another gradually before our

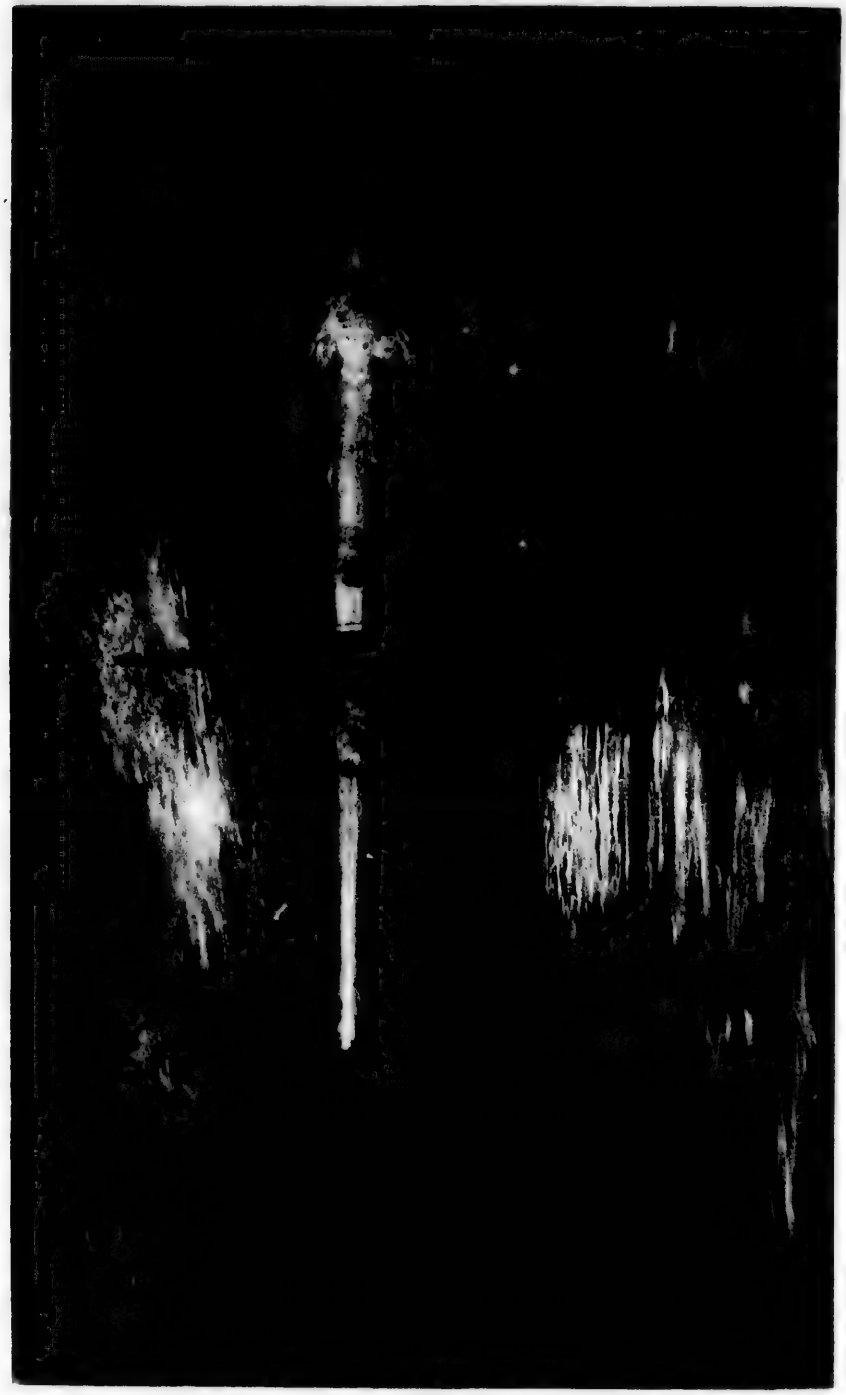
MIDDLE BLYTHE.

eyes. First of all comes the high chalk-down near Yantlet Creek, with its famous clump of tall beech-trees—"a mighty sign to them that sail the seas"; and then beyond them the vague tower of All Hallows Church, looming indistinctly through the golden haze; and further still, the group of scattered buildings known as the Aviary, clustered on the slope of the low hillside. Opposite the Chapman light (which shows up dimly on the Essex shore) we come to the dismal levels of St. Mary's Marsh, with St. Mary's Church standing out against the leaden sky on the hill-top, and a little more to the west, Queen Elizabeth's Hall, a gloomy-looking building overhanging the green salt-marshes to which it gives its name. Cowling

Marsh comes next, with Cowling Church, also on a hill, to mark it in the background for the sailor's behoof. The big castle buildings on the edge of the swamp—a double-towered gatehouse, built up into the precincts of a modern farm—are all that now remain of Cowling Castle, once the principal home of the great house of Cobham. In its best days the castle, a massive pile, embattled by John de Cobham in the reign of Richard II., formed a square court surrounded by a moat, with a gatehouse flanked by two circular and machicolated towers, which alone of all the ancient architecture now survive. It was here that the Lollard leader, Sir John Oldcastle, who took the title of Lord Cobham from his marriage with the heiress of the Cowling family, shut himself up in his isolated stronghold from Archbishop Arundel's apparitor, and boldly refused to listen to the citation for heresy which the archbishop had issued against him in his Kentish home. Even after the Lollard champion had been burnt in chains for heresy, his widow, Lady Cobham, continued to live in Cowling Castle, which her descendants occupied till after the Restoration. The buildings were, however, much damaged by Sir Thomas Wyatt during his insurrection in the reign of Mary; and the ruins have now at last been converted into a solid and substantial but picturesque manor farmhouse, little visible from the water's edge.

The village on the hill that bounds the view as we near the end of Sea Reach and approach Lower Hope Point is Cliff-at-Hoo, a place now almost utterly neglected, but once famous in early English history as the town where the Mercian kings, during the period of their long supremacy, held many successive synods of the English Church. It stands on the very edge of the chalk, overlooking the marshes, and takes its name from the inland cliff formed by the face of the precipitous hill on the northern escarpment. Under its ancient name of Clovesho, it turns up frequently in the early ecclesiastical annals of England, ever since the days of Archbishop Theodore, the Greek monk of Tarsus, who first really organised the English Church, and who provided for an annual synod of the bishops and clergy at this now remote and seemingly improbable place. Few pilgrims in these days ever penetrate the Hundred of Hoo as far as Cliff; but those who do so, find it one of the most interesting belated country villages in the whole

The Chapman Light.



modernised and vulgarised south-eastern corner of this iron work-a-day nineteenth-century England.

A tack from the edge of the Blythe, opposite the pass in the chalk-hills at Cliff which serves as a guide to the navigation of the Lower Hope corner, brings us over quickly with half a wind to the solitary and desolate buildings of Thames Haven, a prey to the common waterside plague of corrugated iron. Corrugated iron sheds, corrugated iron roofs, corrugated iron palings—the entire place seems wholly given over to the utilitarian worship of that eminently unpicturesque deity, corrugated iron. Thames Haven indeed, in spite of its fine-sounding name (which ought by right, of course, to belong only to the Port of London), is a purely artificial town, or rather village, consisting of little more than railway buildings and cattle enclosures, brought into existence by the live-stock trade with Holland and North Germany. A small branch line has a terminus here on a flat and lonely coast—a mere desert of sand, covered by a few hasty square mercantile-looking buildings, where suspected cattle undergo their unconscious quarantine, and lobster vessels from the Norwegian fiords or Scottish inlets land their living freight at a light iron pier. Yet dreary as is Thames Haven on its terrestrial side, the scene from the water is not without striking elements in its own way. A Trinity steamer is lying alongside as we pass the pier, waiting to change the lightship men or keepers on the Mouse or the Maplin; a couple of fishing vessels are discharging cargo for the railway hard by, in true fisher style; and a lighter smack, flying the pretty Norse flag from her mainmast, is just getting under way for her return voyage to the beautiful long firths of Christiania or Bergen. That is the redeeming feature of these tidal rivers: however dull and flat and ugly the natural scenery may be in its own nature, here, and here only, man's utilitarian art has stepped in to unconsciously beautify it, and to enliven the dreary coast with all the changeful picturesque panorama of white sails and dark hulls and red lighthouses, and hardy fisher life, till at last what was in itself and on the large scale absolutely barren and unprofitable becomes by human additions wonderfully varied and vivid and interesting in all its details.

From Thames Haven, where we lie up sketching till past our frugal

dinner, we must take another turn backward along the northern Essex shore to explore the intricate system of inlets and washes that spreads along the marshy stretch of coast between that adventitious town and the Leigh river. This marshy region was first reclaimed by Dutch navvies of the same sort as those who drained and made habitable the Cambridgeshire fenland, the whole area having been recovered from the sea by one Joas Crappenburg in the reign of James I., and architectural eyes see (or profess they see) to this day traces of the Dutch style of farm-building in the curious square old-fashioned granges that stud the level but not infertile flats of Canvey Island. The names, however, are rather Scandinavian than Low Dutch in type; the Skars, and Further Wick, and Leigh Beck, and so forth, having all of them the regular old Norseman ring; and it seems probable that the Danish pirates have more to do with the original history of Canvey than the peaceable seventeenth-century delving Hollanders. The Sluice House that pumps the water from the artificial dykes and serves us for a guide into the neighbouring creek, bears a name that well embodies the utter isolation of the Canvey people, for it has been not inaptly christened the World's End.

Just below Thames Haven we turn up this long and desolate sandy creek that opens abruptly to the northward, where a number of Dutch-looking craft may generally be seen riding at anchor in the narrow central channel between the low flats of Canvey Island and the dreary marshy Essex mainland. Holy Haven they call it, one of the innumerable tidal mazes in which sea and stream mingle together inextricably on these nether reaches—at high water a broad expanse of salt river, at ebb a shining flat of acrid mud and belted sandbank. In Holy Haven lie a number of hulks stored with dynamite, painted red and moored far apart in the side channel. A ship bound out is waiting in the river, and a light barge with red sides and flapping powder flag has run in hard by to bring her expected cargo of dynamite. Finding no one on board the hulk, the crew begin casually to load at once, passing the cases as fast as they are able from one ship to the other. Fortunately, a boat pulls off from the shore in hot haste, the old ship-keeper calling all the time something inarticulate at the top of his voice, which we find out, when he finally nears us, to be

the awful words "Those are detonators." The instantaneous slackening of work by that crew surpasses all possible description.

The oddly rigged ships that lie out of the main thoroughfare of commerce in this winding *cul de sac* are eel-schuyts from Holland, bringing over the numberless eels that fatten through the summer in the Dutch canals, and are caught by thousands in the bucks or weirs on their return voyage to the sea in the autumn months. The schuyts are curiously constructed for their special trade, the middle compartment, where the fish are stored, being composed of a sort of tank partially open to the sea, while the two ends are watertight. In this manner the eels, floating about freely in the water, remain fresh until they reach England. But the reason alleged for the delay at Holy Haven is a sufficiently curious one, and throws a certain lurid light of its own upon the average composition of Thames water below London. The eels cannot live, it seems, in the polluted river above the point where it begins to narrow; there is too much of what is euphoniously described as "organic matter" in the silvery Thames even for their omnivorous tastes. So the schuyts lie up quietly at Holy Haven, waiting for further orders from the centre of the fish trade at Billingsgate. By-and-by, when the consumer in London is ready for more eels, a tug comes down promptly to Holy Haven, and the first schuyt in order hurries up as rapidly as possible through the foul water to the great market. There the eels are taken out alive, and their further destination becomes one of those culinary mysteries into which neither the humanitarian nor the practical gastronomer should inquire too closely or curiously.

In spite of the foul water, however, the native Thames eels themselves must manage to make their way up through the brackish tidal reaches successfully, somehow or another; for large quantities certainly exist in the upper river, and many are caught in the great bucks which form such picturesque features across the face of the stream at Maidenhead and elsewhere. The eel, in fact, exactly reverses the procedure of the salmon. Though he is practically a freshwater fish in all essentials, he goes down every year to spawn in the sea, if by any possibility he can manage to get there. The young fry, known as elvers, are usually hatched out in salt water, and shortly after begin to ascend the river from which their parents

migrated—at least, so the fisher folk always tell one, though by what mark they can distinguish the spawn or fry of a Thames eel from those of a rival from the Medway or the Blackwater, it is hard indeed for the uninitiated outsider to imagine. But it would be cruel too minutely to examine these picturesque little fables of the fishing population with the sober microscope of science or even the cool eye-glass of common sense; let it be granted, as Euclid would put it, that the young elvers are wise enough to know, not only their own fathers, but even the shortest way to the river from which they emigrated—for, indeed, the tide is hardly likely to drive them up any other. In the spring these little wriggling creatures begin to ascend the parent stream, then, in vast shoals known as eel-fairs. For the most part they hug the bank, and keep to very shallow water, and at the mouth or confluence of each tributary a small detachment tells itself off silently to occupy the side streams, while the main body continues to swim with undiminished vigour up the chief river. Vast numbers die by the way, of course, but there are still enough left to keep the eel population of England permanently up to its normal level. Weirs, walls, and other human obstructions tend somewhat to damp the ardour of their onward course, though your eel is not readily daunted by anything short of a smooth perpendicular surface, and will make valiant efforts to wriggle his way up whatever impediment the resources of civilisation have placed across his path. However, the eel-fishers generally temper the wind to his back (metaphorically speaking) by letting down artificial ladders of twisted straw or hay, by whose aid the aspiring elver at last surmounts the obstacles that bar his journey towards the final goal. In the autumn the adult eels also descend the river to their spawning beds with equal unanimity, in formed batallions: and it is during these annual migrations that they are chiefly caught in the eel-bucks, with an ultimate eye to the manufacture of that famous eel-pie which gives its name to the well-known and pretty little eyot near Henley-on-Thames. The Dutch eel trade flourishes most during the same autumn months; and it is then that the schuyts may be seen most thickly congregated in Holy Haven, waiting for the signal from the million hungry mouths of the London eel-eaters, to continue their interrupted journey up the desecrated and polluted Thames.

The tidal flood that fills the long arms of Holy Haven Creek loses itself gradually in various divergent branches, one of which, trending in devious curves through muddy channels to the east, at last unites with Leigh Creek, and so separates the low marshy ground to southward into an isolated bit of land known to modern lips by the unduly pleonastic title of Canvey Island. Pleonastic, of course, because the word Canvey itself already implies the insular character of the land to which it attaches. The syllable *ey* or *y*, found at the end of almost all island names around the coast of Britain, is a last evanescent form of the old English word *ig*, an island; and as such it reappears not only in Canvey, Sheppey, Wallasey, Harty, and Elmley in the Lower Thames district, but also in Walney, Scilly, Bardsey, and many other islets elsewhere. Sometimes, too, it assumes a slightly different and deceptive spelling, which masks its real derivation, as in Anglesea (formerly Anglesey)—that is to say, the Isle of Englishmen; Selsea (formerly Selsey), the Isle of Seals; Mersea, the Marshy Isle; and Chelsea, the Isle of Shingle. Indeed, in spite of local antiquarians, it would seem as though Jersey, Guernsey, and Alderney must be added to the same list. But while nobody ever dreams of saying Jersey Island or Anglesea Island, any more than they dream of saying Cumberlandshire or Northumberlandshire, Canvey has been less philologically fortunate, and has come now to be universally known as Canvey Island, a case exactly parallel to those of Lake Windermere and Mount Ben Jerlaw. The meaning of the old descriptive word has been forgotten, and then the modern word of the same meaning has been unnecessarily added to it as a defining suffix. Canvey is banked all round to keep out the tide, whether by the Dutch or the natives, and, though very isolated, is far from being so utterly wild and unkempt as the neglected islands around the junction of the Thames and the Medway. On the contrary, it supports an immense number of black-faced salt-marsh sheep, which find excellent pasturage on its saline weeds and rank grasses; and it even boasts the possession of a church or chapel, situated somewhere near the centre of the long flat area. How few people really know anything of the numberless component elements that go to make up that familiar geographical expression the British Isles! There are over a thousand of them all together, not including mere sea-rocks or inland

cyots; and yet even a School Board pupil-teacher (who, I suppose, is the most encyclopædic personage now existing in the whole modern British community) couldn't probably tell one offhand the proper names of a round dozen of them. Here is Canvey Island, for example, a bit of land five miles long and as big as the Bill of Portland, lying within an hour's run of London, too, yet more remote for all practical purposes than what Gibbon called "the remotest of the Hebrides," and absolutely unknown even by name to about four millions out of the four million and odd inhabitants of the Metropolitan postal district. Better indeed to live in vain than to live in Canvey.

Rounding the island by slow degrees, and not without the ignominious aid of a pole—for there is little wind, and what little there is heads dead against us—we come out again on the broad expanse of Leigh Creek, where we put in already a couple of nights since, and see the long stretch of Southend pier looming large and bare, like a great white skeleton, in front of us. On the mud-flats the big grey herons stand fishing in the intersecting tidal streams, erect on their tall legs, with keen eyes bent downward fixedly upon the darting fish in the water below. From the mouth of the creek a quick run before the light breeze takes us back with the mounting tide as far as Holy Haven, where we propose to lie up for our evening's rest and to lay in a little store of fresh bread against our remaining upward journey. Our course lies over the submerged sands of the Chapman and past the handsome pile lighthouse that guards the rocky neighbourhood known as the Skars. The light stands forty feet above high-water level; and as we pass, the fog-bell slowly begins its ominous droning, for the weather is thickening on every hand, so that we are not sorry to reach our intended anchorage a full hour before the deep red hazy sunset. It drizzles on deck, so we take to the cabin for refuge, and set about finishing half-completed sketches. That, with tea and yarns, carries us over till our early bed-time. It is astonishing how many yarns an old hand manages to pick up in the course of his wanderings, and how useful they come in on a lazy cruise in the absence of work, books, or papers.

Not, I will confess, that the seafaring life lends itself readily to literary occupations. Men are too tired at the end of a long watch to do much else

but turn in and sleep off their fatigue. Indeed, my impression is that though the sea-men invent the yarns, it is almost always the landsmen who write them down. Of course, there is the one great exception of Marryat; and, more recently, Pierre Loti has shown the world that a sailor can write to match the best. But these are rare examples; for the most part it is the land-lubber who sings the joys of the ocean. Dibdin passed his life in a library; "Tom Cringle's Log" was written by a merchant at Kingston, Jamaica; and Mr. Clark Russell is *not*, I understand, the mate of a fishing-smack. I expect, if we could get to the very bottom of it, we should find after all that the Odyssey was really composed by a landsman, and that the epic of the sea was first chanted to rustic ears in inland Arcadia.

THE MUCKING LIGHTHOUSE.

OVENS SPIT.

CHAPTER VII.

GRAVESEND AND TILBURY.

ABOVE Sea Reach the river narrows suddenly and unexpectedly. The Mucking lighthouse, a high red-banded white tower, erected on piles by the Essex shore on the edge of Mucking Flat, about a mile westward of Thames Haven pier, marks the entrance of the next reach, known as the Lower Hope. The names of all these bights, bends, and elbows on the Lower Thames are very ancient, perhaps even prehistoric; certainly the fact that the Hope must have been so called in mediæval times at least is clear from the names of places on its bank, such as Stanford-le-Hope, whose very form shows them at once to be of Norman or early Plantagenet origin. It is Stanford-le-Hope Church whose tower shows up so boldly upon our right as we turn the corner by Mucking lighthouse and steer southward toward the great batteries that here guard the outer entrance of the narrower Thames. At Coalhouse Point on the Essex shore, and Shornmead on the Kentish side, two sister fortifications sweep with their heavy guns the entire breadth of the river; and torpedoes are kept in readiness for use in case of need in blocking up this easiest naval pathway to the wealthy heart of mercantile England. The Hope is a dull and uninteresting reach in other ways, for here the shore on either side runs flat and marshy, and the ships alone, that now begin to gather in somewhat more closely to a common centre, give life and animation to an otherwise somewhat dreary and greyish scene.

Off Gravesend.

The solitary man in the small boat who hangs about so carelessly between all the big steamers and heavy merchantmen and fast sailing clippers by the Lower Hope follows the calling emphatically known on the tidal Thames as that of a mud-pilot. He knows the river, with all its shoals and flats and mudbanks, and he pilots vessels up from Sea Reach to their final berths in the inner Port of London. You may see these lonely men often enough tossing about unconcerned in their small open boats by day or night, with provisions for a week stowed away in the locker, far down into the stormy estuary, where so frail a craft runs the double danger of being swamped by heavy seas or run over by a passing steamer. But the struggle for existence presses hard on all of us; and the mud-pilot is glad enough to risk his life on the open tidal mouth of the river, if only he can gain a passing chance of extra employment by a homeward-bound ship on a single little upward journey.

The big hull moored in the river a little out of the ordinary channel of traffic, with red flag flying from the masthead, is a powder magazine, and all Ordnance vessels having gunpowder on board are similarly marked with the same expressive and universal danger-signal. Steamers and vessels having fires on deck are warned to keep well to leeward of these explosive ships; but such is the innate carelessness or perversity of human nature that many of them insist upon running close to windward to try whether they can manage to get themselves comfortably blown up in the process or not. A single spark from the funnel, or a bit of live ash leaping from the blazing cauldron fire of a Leigh shrimper, might blow a powder-vessel and every other ship within easy reach of it into indistinguishable fragments in half a second; and yet steamers and shrimpers sail close up even when the hatches are off, and loose powder shaken from the packages is lying about confusedly over all the decks. Truly the British sailor is a very fearless and courageous person, but sometimes his fearlessness comes perilously near being considered merely foolhardy. If he were only a convinced Buddhist, now, one might set it down to his abstract desire for Nirvana (I speak with the fear of Dr. Rhys Davids before my eyes), but Nirvana is certainly not the kind of paradise adapted to the special and peculiar views of the sturdy and unsophisticated British sailor.

Passing the sandbank known by the quaint title of the Ovens, we begin to approach the manufacturing neighbourhood of Gravesend. Here, for the first time almost on our upward course, we feel we are slowly nearing the far-reaching outskirts of a vast modern civilised centre. Down below, the aspect of unbroken Nature was for the most part one of utter wildness, solitude, and desolation. The lonely stretches of the Essex coast, the endless shoals and sandbanks of the middle channel, the marshy flats and rëentrant mazes of the Swale and the Medway, all seemed utterly remote from the full tide of life that seethes and centres noisily and smokily round the mighty eddying hub of our tumultuous London. But at Gravesend for the first time we seem to find ourselves face to face with the last long outstretched feeler of the London spider, that spins its ever-widening web in concentric rings over the whole marred spaces of rustic Essex, Kent, and Surrey. Here are numberless tugs, with coal hulks for their use; coastguard ships and quarantine hulks flying a yellow flag; and more powder vessels with their appropriate danger-signals. The Gravesend waterman is a very important item too: hundreds of wherries crowd the stream; and one in particular, the long red wherry with a covered-in poop, carries the powder off to the ships who may not land above this point on the London river. Moreover, we are getting into the region of carbon. At Canvey Island and by Yantlet Creek there might be mud and fog and odours innumerable, but at least there was not that foulest of all foul fiends—smoke. At Gravesend there is smoke enough in all conscience, coming from the town itself and from the lime-works beyond it; and the whole look of the place is modern, east-endy, dull, and smoky, after the true London Thames fashion.

And yet Art, by one of those miracles so familiar to her, has turned the smoke and dirt and mud and fog of London, and of the Thames below it, into a positive element of beauty in its own kind, a sort of murky halo well befitting the great lurid grimy capital of our solid and squalid English civilisation. Adapting himself to the peculiar world he lives in, the English artist has set himself to work to interpret for us in his own native language the misty, grey, murky metropolis of the British nation, and the dull tawny river road that leads straight up into its gloomy bosom. By a singular

coincidence, almost all our chief towns lie in the midst of just such marshy tidal levels; the site of London itself was a vast morass before the narrow lanes and alleys of the City were built across it, and the Fleet and Houndsditch and a dozen more such marshland names still remind us of the misty sea-levels out of which the great city has gradually risen. Liverpool in the solemn hollow of the muddy Mersey; Glasgow by the low, dank, dreary reaches of the disguised Clyde; Bristol in the deep basin of the encumbered Avon, are all of them just as flat and dark and smoky as London itself. And even Oxford and Cambridge, the two greatest intellectual centres, after the capital, in the whole island, though not cursed with the plague of smoke, are foggy and misty in the extreme, standing one of them on the flooded water-meadows of the overflowing Isis, and the other by the lazy Cam, in the exact centre of the eastern Fenlands. Under these circumstances it is no wonder that fog and smoke should have stamped their impress on the very warp and woof of English life and English art; that our landscapes should deal so often with misty effects and hazy lights and cloudy skies and stormy mornings by the murky sea; that our painters should watch the pale blue wreaths that curl from the chimneys in the hollow gap of Hastings Old Town; should linger lovingly among the enchanted wharves of Yarmouth or Great Grimsby; and should put on canvas the dim grey shapes that loom up indistinctly through the faint white haze upon the Thames Embankment. Thus, out of these strange and seemingly unpromising materials, English Art has built herself a beautiful and stately palace; from these curious half-undeciphered hieroglyphics she has interpreted to us the actual world whose dusky panorama passes for ever mistily before our very eyes. In doing so, she has done well; Wisdom herein is justified of all her children. She has given us a picture as impressive and beautiful in its way as any whose lineaments she could have caught upon the arid hills of Attica or under the cloudless skies of sunny Italy.

How strange to think that even English Art itself has been definitely affected by the Gulf Stream and the prevailing westerly breezes! The British Islands, standing on the extreme verge of Western Europe, owe their unusually damp and misty climate, of course, to their insular position, and

their situation as a condensing bulwark for the moisture-saturated winds that blow direct upon them from the North Atlantic. That circumstance has given England its greenness and freshness, and has in so far differentiated our native landscape art as a whole from the landscape art of Southern Europe. Our scenery and our pictures are cooler, moister, and more subdued; our outlines are softer, vaguer, more poetical. The definiteness and sometimes garishness of Italian landscapes is never seen on English soil. The clear skies of Italy have produced marvellous effects in their own magnificent way; but it is largely to the distinctive tenderness and haziness of the English lights that we owe the peculiar qualities of a Constable, a Crome, a David Cox, or a Turner.

Grimy and black as Gravesend looks at present, it has been a place of gaiety and great pageants in earlier days when the skies were still unclouded by smoke, and when the "Silver Thames" was still the one natural highway by which all inward-bound passengers approached the golden-paved streets of mediæval or Elizabethan London. The portion of the river between Gravesend and London Bridge was known as the Long Ferry; and the adjoining manors of Milton and Gravesend had a monopoly of the right to carry travellers over it up and down the crowded maritime thoroughfare. With the exquisite simplicity of old English manners, the boatmen were bound by the terms of their charter to provide trusses of fresh straw as beds for the passengers. When distinguished visitors arrived in the Thames, the Lord Mayor and Aldermen proceeded down the river in their gilded barges to welcome their highnesses to the Port of London and usher them in a state procession up the river of which they were the traditional conservators to the Guildhall landing-stairs. With the gradual pollution of the water, the growth of London fog, the universal dispersion of smoke, and the reign of industrial gloominess generally, all these picturesque realisations of the intimate connection between the City and the Thames have died out utterly, so that very few modern Londoners in this age of railways can ever adequately realise the genuine underlying dependence of the British capital upon the largest and longest tidal river in the whole of Europe.

A marked peculiarity of this Long Ferry on the Thames from Gravesend

Gravesend Reach.

up to London Bridge consists in its essentially artificial character as a banked-up high-level stream. Thousands of people in the British Islands, who have learned from their childhood upward that the Po is confined along all its lower course by long lines of dams, and that the Mississippi flows through the bayous of Louisiana between great levees above the level of the surrounding marshlands, have probably but little idea that the very same thing is true of the tidal Thames at their own doors, and that the bursting of its banks has more than once realised the famous Virgilian picture of the broken sea that rushes forth to flood the happy fields and overwhelm the toilsome work of men and oxen. On either hand tall embankments hem in its course, between which the river flows as in an aqueduct, so that at times you can look over from the deck of a passing steamer on to gardens and meadows lying far below. The date of these important works is quite unknown; probably [illegible] of immemorial antiquity, perhaps even Romano-British. Up to [illegible] ely recent period it is certain that the whole Thames estuary [illegible] as London was a wide arm of the sea; and above the marine deposits which still cover the whole low-lying country to right and left, a sheet of river-silt forms at present the surface soil, thus testifying to the gradual reclamation of the area by the deposition of alluvium over the tidal swamps. Before the last act in this natural process of land-making could be fully carried out, however, man stepped in with his intrusive embankments and shut out the river forcibly from the subjacent flats over which it was slowly gathering its fertilising mud. For many generations the dams grew occasionally leaky, and we shall pass several spots on our further course up stream to London where great inundations occurred at various periods and overflowed the neighbouring fields for miles around. "These formidable embankments," says Dr. Smiles, "winding along the riverside, up creeks and tributary streams, round islands and about marshes, from London to the mouth of the Thames, are not less than three hundred miles in extent."

Opposite Gravesend, on the Essex shore, the quaint old remnants of Tilbury Fort stretch their front along the bend of the river, and call up mingled memories of Queen Elizabeth or of Sheridan's "Critic," according to the romantic or burlesque turn of the individual fancy. It is quite a mistake,

however, to associate the Queen, as is so often done, with the existing Tilbury. Indeed, though part of the fort is tolerably old, as fortresses go in our peaceable England, no portion of it can by any means date back as far as the days when Elizabeth mustered here the poor little army which possessed the glorious infatuation of believing itself a possible match for the Spanish Armada. There were no regular fortifications on this site at all in the sixteenth century, nor till long after; and the camp where the Earl of Leicester's forces were assembled lay higher up the river and a little inland, near West Tilbury Church, where some remnants of the earthworks said to have been thrown up for their use may still be seen, though suspicious antiquaries pronounce them really of Roman origin. Only a small blockhouse, of the type common in the days of Henry VIII., then existed on the spot occupied by the modern fort; and this blockhouse was hastily strengthened during the alarm of the Armada by an ingenious Italian engineer. The oldest part of the present Tilbury Fort was erected in the reign of Charles II., after the Dutch fleet had sailed up the Medway, and when Mr. Pepys himself quaintly observed in the confidential unreserve of his own cypher diary, "Everybody nowadays reflects upon Oliver and commends him, what brave things he did, and made all the neighbour princes fear him." Most of the existing building is modern, and as devoid of architectural beauty as the general run of modern fortifications; but the gateway and a few other old bits of work redeem the total effect from the artistic point of view, and the big guns are sufficient to demolish any latter-day ironclad armadas that might possibly in future attempt to wedge their way up the well-defended reaches of the tidal Thames.

Round the corner by Tilbury Fort the river begins to narrow considerably, and to lose the greater part of its straggling refluent estuarine appearance. We are now in Grays or Northfleet Hope, and shall have nothing but very plain sailing before us all the rest of our way to the quays of London. Farewell to the long creeks and marshy isles and broad sallow sandbanks of our lower journey; the straight road to the great Port alone remains—a little tortuous, to be sure, in its nineteen reaches, but still straight enough in the sense that we shall have no more divergences or pleasant side cuts in future—only the main highroad of modern British

utilitarian commerce. The banks draw in to right and left, giving us a clear view of both shores at once for the first time on our upward voyage. On one side Northfleet town displays its chalk-burning chimneys; on the other, the new Tilbury Docks occupy the low region long known to river-haunting folk as West Tilbury Marshes. The bit of luxuriant greenery to the south is Rosherville Gardens, that famous self-advertised purveyor of a

CEMENT WORKS, NORTHFLEET HOPE.

happy day; its mimic crags consist of the harder masses of chalk left behind as useless during the excavations of the lime-works, and lend themselves effectively enough to the artificial allurements of the landscape gardener's art. Some of them indeed, weathered by exposure and overrun with ivy, are not devoid of that real picturesqueness so generally associated with the green-grown flinty layers of every disused chalk-pit. Their hideous title has been compounded from the name of their first proprietor, one Jeremiah Rosher, and that horrid un-English termination *ville*, which seems so increasingly dear to the unspeakable taste of the British vestryman. Strange that with all our wealth of beautiful native terminations for local names—*ham*, and *worth*, and *hope*, and *ley*, and *hithe*, and *den*, and *bury*—Englishmen should positively go out of their way to adopt so strange and ugly a vulgarism as that distressful Frenchified *ville*. The new Tilbury Docks form one of the latest additions to the accommodation of the Thames, as they have not yet been fully completed, by the bend in the channel whose outer point bears even yet the Norse pirate's name of Tilburyness. Indeed, it is said that to protect the church tower of Northfleet from river corsairs

even at a far later period it was necessary to turn it into a fort, just as Miles Standish mounted his brazen howitzer on the steeple of New Plymouth chapel, "A preacher that spoke to the purpose, orthodox, flashing conviction right into the hearts of the heathen." The same sort of religious argument (*mutatis mutandis*) was largely employed on several occasions by our early English ancestors against the foolish scruples of the Odin-worshipping Scandinavian pagans.

As we beat up the Gravesend Reach, between Rosherville and the Tilbury Docks, the skipper shouts to us from the forecastle, "Look out! port your helm. Here's another Sudden Death bearing down upon us in full swing." We look up, and see in front of us a swift but very clumsy-looking steamer, ploughing her way noisily through the water, as if all the Thames were her own private freehold and small yachts like ours were merely unauthorised trespassers on her broad domain, deserving to be prosecuted with the utmost rigour of the maritime law. Indeed, she seems inclined to inflict summary justice forthwith upon our presumptuous little craft for the atrocious crime of daring to exist at all, for she goes straight ahead, which ever way suits her best, regardless of intervening obstacles or of that mysterious and elusive entity, "the rule of the road at sea." We recognise her trade and nature at once, partly from her peculiar build, and partly too from her still more peculiar and characteristic manners. She is a fish-carrier bound for the North Sea, where she picks up fish from the trawlers and other smacks, and hurries up with them heedlessly at full speed to all-devouring Billingsgate. These fish-carriers are very wild and queerly navigated vessels; their one great point is their swiftness, and beyond that there is nothing on earth to be said in their favour. They are generally supposed to be utterly innocent of charts and navigation; their whole cunning consists in dashing rapidly down river in the straightest possible line for Orfordness, and then making boldly for a point in space, situated somewhere about the rough centre of the German Ocean, where they hope to fall in with the fishing fleet. Probably there is fog about, and the fish-carrier whistles through it vehemently with the greatest audacity. Presently she meets a belated Yarmouth fisherman. "Where's the fleet?" shouts the captain. "Down to looard," shouts back the smack with lordly ambiguity, pointing

Off Tilbury Docks.

vaguely a dim hand to the nor'east. Immediately the carrier starboards her helm, and rushes off madly under all steam in the direction indicated. Sooner or later she falls in with some trawlers or other—no matter whom: all is fish alike that comes to the carrier's net. In rather less than no time the haul is transferred to her capacious maw, and off she goes again, making convulsively for another point in space, this time supposed (more or less correctly) to be occupied by the Shipwash or Orfordness. Her one object in life is to get up to Billingsgate while the fish are still fresh; and provided she can accomplish that solitary final cause of her much-objurgated existence, she recks but little of lesser fry like yachts or barges. The other craft upon the river do not usually speak with fervid affection of the hurrying fish-carriers. Indeed, their language on the subject is apt to be sprinkled with an unnecessary wealth of the choicest and richest marine expletives.

NORTHFLEET.

FIDDLER'S REACH.

CHAPTER VIII.

FROM FIDDLER'S REACH TO PURFLEET.

THE life of the middle Thames is more infinitely varied and multifarious than that of any other stretch of water—fresh, or salt, or brackish—on the whole face of the navigable earth. It is not merely from the ships going up and down ceaselessly over its surface that the river derives its singular interest; there are all the relatively fixed elements of the scene as well to diversify and individualise the different reaches as we go along. Here, it is a little wooden pier with small passenger steamers discharging their living freight perpetually upon its bustling wharf; there, it is a ferry-boat from side to side, conveying batches of railway travellers across the severing stream between Kent and Essex; and yonder again it is a row of mouldering disused barges, lying by against the withering green slime of the tidal mud and serving for a private mark to the numerous small boats that ply up and down the busy central swim from morn to evening. Close by it is a

powerful dredger, the *Sampson* or the *Queen Bee*, with a perfect fleet of busy workers gathered round her, barges and ballast lighters carrying away the dredgings as fast as they come up from the grimy bottom. The Trinity ballast lighter, in fact, is the ugliest vessel on the whole river: about the shape of half a walnut-shell, with a lump of a mast the same thickness all the way up tumbling forward over the clumsy bow. At the mast-head is nailed instead of vane an ugly board bearing the ship's number. These queer craft are said, for some abstruse reason, to be worked by Welshmen. At one place as we proceed, a number of floating private buoys mark the accustomed berths of rich men's yachts; at another, a riverside yard shows the bare timbers and shattered figure-heads of stranded vessels now being broken up in dejected fashion for the value of their wood and old metal. A mermaid, minus the nose, stands for an ornament in a retired skipper's cottage garden; Britannia, torn from the prow of some wrecked Hull collier, guards the black and dusty precincts of a village coal-yard. Sometimes it is a great heavy training-ship for boys, like the *Exmouth* or the *Shaftesbury*, that stamps its token on a particular bend or reach; sometimes it is the huge swinging gateways of a deep-cut dock; or the mastless hull of a floating Seamen's Hospital moored by the shore; or the white façade of a long stucco mansion boldly fronting the lively river. Up and down between these permanent features in the busy scene, an endless procession of steamers, ships, and barges moves for ever in changeful panorama. Big black hulls of passenger liners to Australia or the Cape; smaller and brighter Channel packets for Antwerp, Ostend, or Boulogne; noisy self-assertive little tugs, with puffing engines; grimy colliers from the northern ports; huge sailing merchantmen from east or west; all pass on, inward or outward, with ebb or flow, night and day, in uninterrupted eager stream. It is a constant feast to sit on deck with a binocular, and read the names and ports of each, as they converge here from every region of the civilised world in one narrowing and ever narrower watery pathway.

The *Cotopaxi* from Melbourne, four thousand tons if she's a pennyweight, one of the biggest of the Orient Line (but not so big by a good bit as the *Austral* that passed us, outward bound, a week since or thereabouts, in Prince's Channel) has just steamed by in full glory, tugs in attendance,

flags flying, and pennon streaming, with the company's banner conspicuously displayed from her main-mast to all comers. Then there's the *Grantally Castle* from the Cape, steaming up a little behind her; and the huge *Egyptian Monarch*, outward bound for New York, a very Memnon among the lesser fry; and beside them the *John and Mary* brig, from Sunderland, nothing abashed by their overawing presence, and ploughing along as proudly as though the whole river were her private pathway and all the other occupants were domestic cattle of the lordly owner. Yonder's a billy-boy from the Lincolnshire coast, flat and squat and cut short at either end to suit the peculiar requirements of her amphibious existence. For billy-boys come from the lock-encumbered canals and rivers of the Humber, hailing mostly from the ports of Hull, Goole, and the like—and (*in utramque paratis*) they are equally adapted for navigation either on the sea or on inland rivers. When the billy-boy goes to sea, she steps masts and hoists sails, and cuts a very respectable appearance of a clumsy kind as a slow sailing vessel: when she reaches her native river she downs mast again, and promptly transforms herself by a hasty metamorphosis into an ordinary canal barge. But as the locks on these fenland waters are rather close together, the billy-boy has to be built to measure, so as exactly to fill them: whence it comes to pass that her outline is as much like that of the space between the two sluices of a lock, just a little cut away into stem or stern at either end, as it is possible for a seaworthy boat conveniently to compass. These are a few stray specimens of the sort of craft you are liable to encounter at any moment on your way up the slow meandering zigzags of the middle Thames reaches.

Tide failed us as we beat with difficulty up Northfleet Hope, and compelled us to lie by for the night at Gray's Thurrock. There are three adjoining villages bearing this common name, and distinguished from one another by prefixes—as West Thurrock, Gray's Thurrock, and Little Thurrock. The brisk waterside town with the pier and beacon where we elect to pass the night derives its first title from the Grey family, who were for some centuries lords of the manor. It is geologically famous from its exposure of the marine deposits which prove the Thames valley to have been an open inlet of the sea as late as or later than the great Ice Age. The

A Corinthian Yacht Race.

gravel and brickearth and loam of the neighbourhood consist of the shingle and mud left behind by the retiring fiord, and the ice-floe that succeeded it; and in them have been discovered the remains of the mammoth, the hairy rhinoceros, the hippopotamus, the large-headed wild-horse, the white cattle and the cave bear, all of which were hunted among the neighbouring flats by the native black-skinned savages of the older Stone Age. By far the most interesting among the fossil remains of Gray's Thurrock, however, are the fragments of a human skeleton discovered here a short time before the arrival of the *Puffin* at the waterside pier, and identified by Professor Owen as undoubtedly those of a palæolithic man. This early hunter of the Thames valley resembled somewhat in type the lowest existing Australian black fellows; but his limbs and features were still more brutal and ape-like in aspect, and his shaggy eyebrows were supported on a solid projecting bony boss, extremely like that which gives the gorilla its terribly fierce and awsome expression. The forehead of this early race was likewise bestially low and receding, while the canine teeth were large and prominent, in a fashion remotely reminding one of the huge tusks which generally prevail among the anthropoid apes. As we sit here on deck, puffing the contemplative cheroot and watching the ceaseless roll of commerce unfolding itself continually before our eyes, it is hard to replace in fancy the dense jungle through which this primitive hunter pursued the wary Irish elk or stalked the gigantic mammoth among the desolate salt-marshes of a still half-frozen and all but unpeopled prehistoric Gray's Thurrock.

Early next morning we get under way once more, for we have a lot of sketching to work through during the day, and the interest of the river thickens upon us with every further advance up the narrowing wedge. We round Broadness on the opposite Kentish bank—note all along how the intrusive Scandinavian pirates have fixed the terminology of these river bends—and give a wide berth to the Black Shelf to northward, a well-named bank, steep-to on the river-front, which dries and welters darkly in the sun at low water. Tide runs very narrow between Broadness and Black Shelf, so that all have to keep well in the central current. Flood and ebb both set strongly on the Black Shelf, and only by sticking close to the main tideway can ships get the full benefit of the tide. The short

bend that opens before us between Gray's Thurrock and Greenhithe is St. Clement's or Fiddler's Reach, the first bit of pretty green scenery of a rustic or Birket Fostery type that we have yet met with on our way up the grim, grey river. It derives its first name of St. Clement's from the picturesque little church by the water's edge upon the Essex shore; a charming small Decorated building with a square tower and a few remarkable modern improvements in the familiar churchwarden style of architecture. The alternative title of Fiddler's Reach is said to be due to an elaborate sailor's joke; the water in the channel is thrown by tide and current into an irregular jumping motion, so that, the sailors say, you can here have dancing without the expense of fiddling. The green grass and trees around St. Clement's Church, with the pleasant meadows and woods behind the mill, and the mock Gothic towers of Belmont Castle on the low down in the distance, form a very agreeable change in the picture after the somewhat monotonous repetition of brown sea-water and dim receding shore through which our path has hitherto for the most part uninterruptedly lain.

To sit on deck and sketch quietly in these upper reaches, however, is a very different thing from tossing about in rain and wind among the misty sandbanks that catch and intensify the long sweeping roll of the North Sea billows off the Kentish Downs or the Essex marshland. It may be more comfortable, but it is certainly a vast deal more prosaic. More prosaic in action, that is to say; for as far as mere external objects go, the great river has its own appropriate and marvellous poetry in every part. The boys who tend the heavy coal-barges, the brown-faced old skippers who lean over the side and shout their commands in stentorian voices, the bronzed sailors who stand waiting on deck to obey the most hasty order in the thronged mid-channel—these form the chief elements of the scene that glides before our eyes as we drift slowly along; and these, with other like features, crowd thicker and closer upon us every moment as we come nearer and nearer from day to day to the noisy quays of all-absorbing London. Especially in these calmer reaches between Gravesend and Purfleet is the crush always rather noticeable. In old days many ships used to lie by here a little on one side of the central roadway, waiting

their turns to be duly admitted to the Upper and Lower Pools. Only a certain number of ships at a time were permitted to take their places in those privileged waters; and the surplus population of the Thames was thus compelled to lie by till room was found for it as vacancies chanced to occur in the nearer moorings. And though steam has now changed all that, the upper reaches are still everywhere thickly crammed with congested shipping. It is this that gives so much charm and vividness to these crowded and vivacious strips of river. Ships, ships, ships, gather closely together here on every side, and afford an endless succession of wonderful natural pictures, in every variety of mood and colour.

Dull minds see beauty in hardly anything. Formal minds see beauty only in the one particular style or object on which they have chosen to lavish their narrow affections. They are so absorbed in Oriental blue that they can allow no merit to Venetian glass; they are so centred on Giotto, or Botticelli, or Fra Angelico, that they can spare no love to Romney or Reynolds, or mere contemporary Wattses and Leightons; they are so entirely devoted to Shelley or to George Eliot that they can see no good points in Tennyson, or Swinburne, or Thackeray, or Fielding. But the more expansive and all-sided mind sees beauty after its own kind in almost all created things. It all depends upon the way you choose to look at them. Mud in itself is not lovely, but mud with the full sunlight shimmering on its opalescent surface; mud with the small sea streams coursing over its deep brown mass in a thousand tiny crystal channels; mud moist from the ebbing sea and purpled by the reflected afterglow of a lurid sunset; mud deeply scored by sea-birds' feet and flecked over here and there by big white gulls and tall grey arching necks of long-legged herons—mud seen under any of these diverse aspects by an observant eye has in it the "promise and potency" of whole untold treasures of pictorial wealth. And what is thus true of the chief component element of the tidal Thames with its surrounding basin is equally true of the shifting mass of sails and hulls and boats and barges that go to fill in the general outline. The dull eye sees in it all only a muddy yellow river, covered with coal-boats, steamers, and screw-tugs. But look closer at the muddy yellow river, and you will find a thousand wonderful tints and undertones of melting olive-green and

dusky brown and tawny chestnut; look closer at the line of mixed and assorted shipping, and you will find an astonishing variety of build and rig and function and nationality, a perfect museum of naval architecture—the big ocean-going clipper or the saucy yacht, the primitive three-masted chasse-marée from the ports of the Loire, or round-stern'd galliots with little muslin-curtained windows on each side of their wonderfully carved rudders, or great black petroleum ships from American ports, unloading the blue barrels into barges in the lower reaches because not allowed to discharge their cargo up nearer London. Everything around smells of the fresh brine and the not unpleasant rotting sea-weed. Whiffs of sweet tar, telling of the joy of ocean, come to us with the breeze from every passing vessel. At dawn the yellow haze lights up the black hulls with the reflected glare from the blood-red water; at sunset the tanned sails of the ruddy barges glow with the golden glory of the western sky. The creaking of the ropes on their groaning blocks, the rattle of chains against the clanking hawsepipes, the dissonant shouts of fair-haired English mariners and dusky Italian seamen and swarthy Lascars, all fall with delightful cadence on the listening ear and suggest innumerable motives for that music of the sea which no composer has ever yet fitly attempted. What wealth of colour and form and life and motion on every side; what endless picturesqueness among the waterside slips and wharves and warehouses! Truly indeed has Carlyle said that the eye sees in everything what the eye itself brings with it the power of seeing. And with our artist-interpreter to read the varied interest of the tidal Thames for us all aright, we should be blind indeed if we could not discern its multiform beauty in every side, as we beat up the swelling current of St. Clement's Reach, with the whole living picture shifting every moment before our eyes, like a vast kaleidoscope of maritime existence.

Across Fiddler's Reach, on the curving southern shore, at the very bend of the river, surrounded by bosky woods and rich upland slopes of soft short sward, stands the flourishing and pretty little waterside town of Greenhithe. As we run across towards it from Gray's Thurrock it is easy enough to understand how it got its pretty old English name—equivalent, of course, to the Green Haven. The chalk here fairly stretches down with

The "Worcester," Greenhithe.

its undulating bosses and gentle combes to the very margin of the now rural river; and its grassy slopes must at all times have afforded a marked contrast to the mud-banks of the tertiary London basin and the alluvial flats which border almost every other portion of the tidal Thames between the bridge and the cliffs of Thanet. Now chalk, in spite of its extraordinary porousness, has a remarkable power of retaining moisture in its surface layers, which it gives out again by evaporation during dry weather; and it is this peculiar faculty that keeps the shallow turf of chalk-downs so fresh and lush during the very hottest and most parched-up summer droughts. A Green Hythe the little haven must have been even when the Norse pirates first ran their long-ships up to Stone-ness on the opposite shore, and fixed the local terminology of the district; and its greenness has been made still more conspicuous by contrast at the present day, for while on the one hand the smoke of Northfleet or Gravesend and the brick-fields of Gray's Thurrock have begrimed the shore and the marshes lower down, on the other hand the well-kept lawns and spreading oaks of Ingress Abbey are probably far greener in their present carefully kempt state than at any previous period in the long history of the tidal river. A pretty pathway runs along the bank through the abbey grounds, and it is worth while to pull the small boat ashore and disembark on the soft ooze, covered with dainty aromatic yellow wormwood, for the sake of a pleasant stroll on dry land through the grassy stretch in front of Thames side. The Abbey House—it can hardly lay fair claim to so high-sounding a title, for it was at best but a grange belonging to Dartford Priory—stands prettily embosomed in trees by the waterside, and derives a certain factitious interest for the Thames pilgrim from the fact that it is partly built with the solid stones of old London Bridge. A very tall chimney close by here bears the suggestive name of the Tower of Babel. Greenhithe is a great place for yachts in the summer season; in winter, it still lives entirely on its chalk, which is extensively quarried and burnt for cement; indeed, most of the small trading craft that line the petty pier are at this very moment waiting to be loaded from the neighbouring kilns. The chalk trade at Greenhithe dates back to a very ancient period; some of the excavations are extremely old, perhaps prehistoric, and it was from the flints of this

chalk belt, no doubt, that the palæolithic hunters of Gray's Thurrock, as well as all the other Stone Age settlers in the middle Thames region, derived the material for their heavy hatchets, their short flake knives, and their shapely barbed and pointed "fairy-bolt" arrowheads.

A shoal ridge runs out into the river off Stone-ness, just opposite Greenhithe; and rounding it at the Beacon, near the Rising Sun, we find ourselves in the straight stretch of Long Reach. Leaving behind the *Worcester*, *Chichester*, and *Arethusa* training-ships at their moorings, we run before the mounting tide with a light breeze for Purfleet. This part of the river lacks in its fixed elements the pretty variety of the brief chalk belt about Northfleet and St. Clement's reaches. We are back to the alluvium of the reclaimed estuary once more, with Dartford marshes closing in the misty view on the Kentish side, and West Thurrock marsh spreading in seemingly endless perspective over the Essex shore. Two old men-o'-war, a line-of-battle ship and a frigate, have been turned hard by into a floating Small-pox Hospital, painted grey, and mastless in the river. Stone Church, "the Lantern of Kent," lies behind us on its chalky hilltop, a large and conspicuous Early English building, long famous as a river-mark, and justly said to be as light by night as by day—a sailor's "sell," meaning that its weight is not an ounce heavier the one time than the other. A little beyond Stone-ness, an inlet opens through the embankment on the north, and leads into a large tidal pool, running up into the West Thurrock marsh as far as the Tilbury and Southend Railway. Its very name, the Breach, tells at once the history of its origin; it is a lake formed in the half-reclaimed estuarine soil by the bursting of the immemorial dyke that carries the river above the level of the adjacent fields. At the end of Long Reach the chalk reappears once more with grateful change at Beacon Hill, a high and picturesque down overhanging Purfleet, where more quarries occur in the best white layers, and where the pits and cuttings, seen from the river, prettily diversify the neighbouring scene. The "chalk wharves" of Purfleet itself are well-known nautical marks, recognised even by the Honourable Corporation of the Trinity House in its authoritative sailing instructions. Purfleet takes its name in part from the Fleet or brook which flows into the river just beyond the town, at whose mouth stand the five

gaunt, naked casemates of the Government powder magazine. Great limeworks help to whiten the Purfleet purlieus, and barrels upon barrels are constantly being loaded into small trading vessels at the quays and piers. At Purfleet is a reformatory ship for young thieves.

The creek that runs into the river just facing Purfleet is the Dart or Darenth, joined a little higher up by the Cray, on whose banks lie St. Paul's Cray, St. Mary's Cray, and Crayford. To sailors, it is commonly known as Dartford Creek, and the point of land beyond it, bounding Long Reach to westward, bears the nautical name of Crayfordness, not because it lies particularly near the town after which it is called, but doubtless for the very practical reason that the Norse pirates who first christened it regarded it entirely from their own point of view as a landmark to show them when they should turn up the inlet to the left on their way to sack the wealthy Kentish yeomen and burghers of Crayford. Indeed, all this country is full even to the present day of Danish reminiscences; and the deep galleries in the chalk, originally excavated by Stone Age miners, or later by Romano-British flint-workers and lime-burners, are popularly known as Dane's Holes, from a tradition that they were used as places of temporary refuge during the sudden incursions of the Scandinavian pirates. At a still earlier period of our history this little creek finds stray mention in the national annals from the fact that the great half-mythical battle of Crayford was fought upon its banks, between Hengist's Jutes on the one hand, and the Romanised British provincials on the other; after which, says the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, "the Briton-Welsh forlet Kentland, and fled with mickle awe to London bury." Later in our annals Long Reach Tavern, out on the marsh by Crayfordness, was a noted place for the practice of prize-fights. In the old days, before the advent of steam colliers, the brigs and schooners used to lie in one line the whole length of Long Reach, waiting their turn to go up to London, and so the reach was a convenient spot for the display of the "noble art" before an appreciative public; but times have changed since then, and Long Reach Tavern is now left out hopelessly in the cold. The lower part of the creek, below Dartford, is still a tidal stream; the marshes on either bank mark the original estuarine deposits of the two converging streams which here fall into the main river from right

and left. Yet, amid all this smoke and dirt and gloom, Nature is not all and wholly unlovely. There is a certain strange beauty even in the very grime which not every eye can see, but which becomes patent to all of us when only we can get the man who possesses the true poetic vision to interpret it for us. It is that that makes the genuine artist. Any man can see the more obvious beauties of the world around him—the rainbows, the waterfalls, the mountains, the ravines—but it takes a true seer to point out to us in detail the unsuspected loveliness of many among the commonest scenes of Nature. 'Twas a strong sense of this underlying charm in what most men reject that made a great artist invent the paradoxical but very pregnant aphorism, "Le beau, c'est le laid."

THE HANDS

ERITH AND BELVEDERE.

CHAPTER IX.

ERITH AND WOOLWICH.

THE short patch of river between Purfleet and Erith bears among seafaring folk the problematical name of Rand's Reach. A shoal here rises up in the very centre of the stream—Rand Hill they call it—dangerous for large vessels, but twelve feet too short to touch the shallow keel of the easy-going, water-skimming little *Puffin*. On our left the ground rises somewhat towards Erith; our right still consists of low embanked land, the curved elbow known as Cold Harbour Point closing the view up the river in this direction. Erith town itself, with its piers and beacons, stands prettily on the Kentish shore, with its tall church-spire nestling below the slope, whose summit is crowned by the prospect tower of the Belvedere Home for Seamen, more familiar to sailors under its older name as Lord Say and Sele's. A little wood adds greatly to the picturesqueness of the boundary shore in this part of our journey; and the river, though widened out into a pool opposite the town, is still narrow enough to allow an easy view of either bank from the deck of a vessel drifting down the mid-channel.

These quiet waterside villages of the old time have not yet lost all their primitive simplicity even in our own Iron Age; but there are few hithes indeed on the tidal Thames which still preserve the antique out-of-the-world look of Henley, and Pangbourne, and Whitchurch, and Lechlade, and so many other delicious rural loitering-places of the upper river. In the old days, however, when coal as yet lay happily undiscovered in the

bowels of the earth—*irrepertum et sic melius situm*—there must have been a delightful mingling of characteristics in such a remote down-river haven as little Erith, a pleasant mixture of rusticity and navigation, trees and tarpaulin, hay and adventure, hops and beacons, such as is nowhere now to be discovered in England proper, though a little of it lingers still in the smaller Welsh coast-towns or the smaller herring-fishing havens of the north-eastern shires of Scotland. And even nowadays, though the smoke and bustle of the great city have long overflowed as far down the river as Erith itself; though the water is only diluted sewage mixed with mud, and the fat salmon no longer mount up Dartford Creek or swim past to leap the weirs by Teddington lock, yet nothing can quite mar the native prettiness of the little basking town placed beneath the hanging woods of Belvedere and the tidal strand, and looking out from all its bright hotels and inns and lodging-houses on the ceaseless procession of the world's wealth, wending its way up the great river to pay its tribute to the English people. For tribute it really is, though we disguise the fact from ourselves often enough by our economical language of "exports and imports," and "balance of trade," and all the rest of it; the fact still remains that a large proportion of the produce of all other countries flows into England year by year, absolutely unpaid for, as the interest due on English capital invested in one way or another on foreign soil. Corn from Egypt, figs from Smyrna, cotton from Bombay, rice from Rangoon, sugar from Mauritius, gold from the West Coast, timber from Canada, rum from Jamaica, cocoa-nut fibre from the South Sea Islands, all come day after day up this silent highway, and all go to feed and sate the curious taste of that omnivorous, lordly, tribute-taking world-despot, the everyday British consumer.

Erith Reach, running between Erith marshes and the Cold Harbour farms, brings us back once more into the alluvial débris that thinly covers the site of the old prehistoric sea fiord. Jenningtree Point is the quaint name of the low spit round which the river bends into the next reach; and just opposite it, the little tidal dyke of Rainham Creek opens up broadly into the Essex marshes on the northern side. All these low lands around the river on either bank show how very slightly it has passed from

the condition of an extensive estuary into one of what can hardly even now be called dry land; and were it not for the formidable embankments carried round the mouths of all these side tributaries or marshland streams, the greater part of the alluvial region would to this day be drowned and waterlogged with every tide. One can easily picture to oneself how, by slow secular elevation, the bare tidal sandbanks and interlacing channels of the outer estuary might similarly be converted, first into fat ague-

JENNINGTREE POINT.

breeding marshes, and finally into rich and well-drained agricultural land. Silt would slowly gather over all the submerged portions, and at last the vegetation itself would help by its own decay to raise the general level of the accumulated soil. Only the central beds of the channels would remain as creeks or watercourses, draining the surrounding morass; and by embanking these and pumping out the water from the sluices, we should exactly reproduce the set of conditions through which the Thames-side low-level stretches have reached their present agricultural stage. It is curious, indeed, that the vast engineering works needed to produce the existing state of things should have been undertaken at so early a period and in

so unobtrusive a fashion that even the very memory of the task should have been utterly forgotten among the traditions of the modern river.

Along the bank here are scattered the works and factories of dangerous or noisome trades not permitted nearer to London. British guano and chemical manures pollute the air; and at intervals neat little powder magazines stud the river, with red flag flying and sentry on guard. Even as we pass, a well-named powder barge, the *Guy Faux*, lies alongside the little pier.

Halfway Reach derives its name from the fact that it lies halfway between London Bridge and the sea, reckoning the commencement of that last somewhat indefinite entity at the piers of Gravesend. Its southern shore is the site of the powder magazine which blew up in 1864, and made a noise that broke the windows of respectable householders (and even magistrates) for many miles around. Its north bank gives access now to Dagenham Docks, a place with a curious history which admirably illustrates the laborious origin of these riverside agricultural lowlands. The parish of Dagenham, at that well-known and definite date, the olden time—say, before the first embankment along the river was erected—consisted in its southern portion of a vast marsh, through which a small stream, by name the Bourne Brook, flowed tortuously through beds of reed and bog-aster down to its lazy confluence with the main tidal river. When the marshes were "inned" or dyked, the embankment reclaimed the whole of this desolate level; and it was the duty of the nuns of Barking Abbey a little further up to undertake the repair and management of the long sea-wall that hemmed it in. Time after time, however, the tide was too much for the Barking ladies, and many inundations swept over the exposed surface of the Dagenham Level. After the Reformation the nuns of course suddenly disappeared, and with them the good work they had carried on, so that the walls of Dagenham decayed accordingly under other management. In James the First's time a great breach was formed in the bank, and the whole valley of the Lea was temporarily inundated. Sir Cornelius Vermugden, the famous Dutch engineer who reclaimed the Fen Country, was called in to stop the damage, and he succeeded in restoring the dam and banking up the whole of Dagenham Creek. In the reign of Queen Anne the

Erith Reach

Thames at last burst the dyke once more, swept away over a hundred acres of land all together, and laid a thousand more completely under water. The owners, after ruining themselves in the vain endeavour to restore the dyke, allowed the Thames in the end to remain master of the situation.

But the scour endangered navigation, and Parliament imposed a tax on all ships entering the Port of London, to defray the expenses of replacing the broken embankment. One Captain Perry, an English engineer, who had been employed by Peter the Great in draining the marsh on the Neva, which is now St. Petersburg, was entrusted with the reconstruction of the broken dyke. He ran a high bank all along the exposed front, and drained off the water from within by means of sluices. The lake formed by the scour, however, he did not attempt to reclaim, and it remained till a few years since as a lonely mere, fringed round by tall green reeds, and resorted to for fishing by a select company of London anglers. The house where they used to resort is still known by the expressive name of Dagenham Breach, keeping up the memory of the disaster from which the deep pool took its origin. In late years, however, advantage was taken of this inexpensive excavation to form another one of those great docks which fringe the shore of the river at intervals almost all the way from London Bridge down to the sea at Gravesend and Tilbury. Unhappily the dock never came to anything, and after spending an immense sum of money the whole enterprise had to be given up. A ruined jetty, through which some large vessel seems to have driven her way (for it is quite cut off from the adjoining shore), is all that can now be seen from the riverside of this great and disastrous undertaking.

The views from the land-side about Dagenham Dock during its brief existence must have been of a very singular and almost paradoxical character. As the river flows at a level many feet above the surrounding meadows, the ships at high water floated through the fields half-way up a hill, or glided incomprehensibly across the surface of the dry land itself. From the embankment, on the other hand, the eye looked down at low water on the south to the river itself, some fifty feet below, and on the north to the serried masts and hulls and spars of the dock that occupied the site of the

vanished lake. It was a striking and singular view even when the intrusive foot of commerce had occupied both sides of the lofty barrier alike; but it must have been a far more remarkable one when the lonely mere on the northern slope was still given over to fish or wild-fowl, and ringed

CROSSNESS

round by a wide belt of rank marsh-weeds extending over an area of nearly thirty acres. "Standing on the top of the bank," Dr. Smiles wrote, before the inception of the ill-fated dock on the present site, "which is from forty to fifty feet above the river-level at low water, we see on one side the Thames, with its shipping, high above the inland level when the tide is up; and the still lake of Dagenham and the far-extending flats on the other—giving at once an idea of the gigantic traffic which flows along this great watery highway, and the enormous labour which it has cost to bank up the lands and confine the river within its present artificial limits." Had the dock scheme succeeded, the still lake would now have been a noisy home of deeply laden vessels, and the rushes and sedges would have given place to a thick vegetation of jib-booms, and main-topgallant masts, and other quaint boughs of naval growth, more lovely than their names, and offering endless subjects to the ready pencil of the marine artist. Fate willed it otherwise, and Dagenham still remains one of the great failures of man on the upper river.

That low point opposite Dagenham Breach is Crossness, with Halfway House, otherwise known as the Leather Bottle, near its utmost extremity. Unsavoury is the memory of Crossness, no longer decked with sailor's crucifix like the one that tops the high cliff at Boulogne, by Caligula's tower; for here is the outfall of the London South Main Drainage, neither picturesque nor poetical as a theme for pen or pencil. What a downfall from the pretty mediæval name; what a desecration of a once holy and consecrated site! We round it slowly into Tripcock Reach, which takes its name from a famous group of trees on the southern shore, near Margaretness, an ancient mark for sailors bound up or down the tidal stream. Here once more we find ourselves enclosed on either hand by low marshy tracts lying below the level of high water in the central channel. To the south stretch Plumstead marshes, which a flood, rushing through a breach in the bank, completely drowned during the reign of Henry VIII., after which they were not reclaimed for a considerable period. To the north, Barking Level extends away along the bank of the Roding river, known

BARKING CREEK.

to sailors in this part of its course as Barking Creek. The vicissitudes of that now malodorous and polluted stream form another interesting illustrative chapter in the history of the gradual reclamation of the Thames estuary. At one time the little town of Barking, which lies a couple of miles north

of the confluence of the Roding with the Thames, ranked as one of the most important fishing communities in the whole of England. Its brown-faced denizens were a folk apart, hereditary fishermen, born and bred to the sea and the river. Londoners almost by position, but inhabitants of a little isolated world of their own; familiar equally with the chaffering of Billingsgate Market, and the bluff weather of the still ruder and noisier German Ocean. The Barking smacks sailed off in little fleets from their tidal creek at the very gates of London to fish for soles and whiting off the Dutch coast, or in the rich Silver Pits of the North Sea; nay, they even ventured as far as the Orkneys themselves in quest of ling and cod, in the proper season. The whole male population of the old town was all but entirely occupied in this fishing industry, which gave occupation to more than a thousand sturdy men and boys.

In time, however, the Nemesis of the Thames estuary came gradually upon them. The Roding river brought down an ever-increasing quantity of silt and mud, till at last the banks of the little tidal creek were all encumbered by beds of soft grey ooze, through which the sluggish river winds its tortuous path with difficulty down to Barking Shelf, where its deposits even block and impede the broad waterway of the Thames itself. Vessels of the tonnage that used once to ascend it can no longer find sufficient draught of water for their deep keels, and the supply of fish to London has largely drifted away from the Barking smacks to the luggers of Great Grimsby or Yarmouth, and the light small craft of Leigh and Whitstable. A considerable number of petty ships still lurk aimlessly about the unattractive stream, whose mud is now even further polluted by factories on the bank, and by the outfall of the London North Main Drainage. But their occupation has mostly slipped off to other places; the railway has to a great extent superseded the river as a road for fish; the new mode of packing in ice has taken the place of the old method of transport in open wells; the North Sea carriers have interfered largely with the Barking trade, and the sons of the hardy fishermen have melted away elsewhere, or taken to growing potatoes and cabbages for Covent Garden, instead of catching plaice and turbot for the supply of greedy Billingsgate. A dreary sight indeed is Barking Creek at the present point of time in

Tide Time, Woolwich Reach.

this workaday nineteenth century; and yet, even here our artist passengers manage to discover some characteristic and picturesque bits for their interpretative pencils. "Many are marvels," says Sophocles with truth, "but naught of all more marvellous than man." Art, after all, has the real Midas gift: whatever it touches turns at once to purest gold.

This desecrated little river Roding, whose lower tidal reach forms Barking Creek, deserves indeed a better fate than to become the final receptacle for London sewage; for it rises among the woods and hills of Epping Forest, and it flows in its upper bends and angles through a pretty rural undulating country toward the broad bosom of the engulfing Thames. Barking town itself, long before it became a fishing centre, could boast of a respectable antiquity and a long historic fame. The very name is one of a peculiar type so common in the London district and by the banks of the Thames that it deserves a moment's passing consideration at our hands as we sail by the mouth of the Creek. The termination *ing*, as Mr. Kemble has amply shown, marks the old township settlements of the Teutonic colonists of Britain; and in meaning it is a patronymic, equivalent to the Scotch *mac*, the Welsh *ap*, or the mediæval English *son* in such names as Johnson, Wilson, Thomson, and Henderson. Thus the sons of Æse would be described as the Æsings; the sons of Eoppa as the Eoppings; and the sons of Uffa as the Uffings. Sometimes the little clans so called after their founder's personal name gave their own designation to the hamlet in which they settled, as the Beorcings did to Barking, the Totings to Tooting, and the Wappings to Wapping. Sometimes they added the descriptive suffixes *ham*, *worth*, *ton*, or *bury*, as the Peadings did at Paddington, the Billings at Billingsgate, the Islings at Islington, the Erkensings at Kensington, and the Newings at Newington. Thus the Romano-British city of London, a merchant commonwealth, isolated within its own stout Italian walls on the hills by the Tower, was girt round closely on every side by intrusive village communities of conquering heathen Teutonic pirates. The district of the Rodings, and the town of Barking (which is its centre), both preserve names of this antique patronymic character. At a later date Barking was the site of one of the earliest among East Saxon convents, famous from its first endowment for wealth and miracles. (Even in these latter unbelieving days

we all know that money will still work wonders.) The Northmen who sailed up the Thames during Alfred's reign destroyed the home of the Benedictine nuns, but it was restored by Edgar the Magnificent, and remained throughout the six centuries of the later Middle Ages the greatest of all the wealthy English nunneries. The Abbess ranked as a baroness, and took precedence of all other abbesses in the whole of England. At the general wreck and scramble of the Dissolution this splendid endowment went the way of all others: the abbey church was ruthlessly demolished, and the only part of the noble buildings which "reform" left intact for our present delectation is a fragment of the solid turreted gate-tower from which the curfew-bell used formerly to be rung. The niche above the gateway stands empty of its disenthroned patron saint, and the crucifix upon the chapel of the Holy Rood has now no memorial remaining save the scanty marks of the obliterated relief barely traceable upon the blank stone wall.

Beeton Gaswork boasts itself to be the largest in the world, while the big iron jetty hard by has pillars like some old temple, with huge modern utilitarian hydraulic cranes for unloading the colliers that lie by at the wharves.

Through Gallion's Reach, between Barking Creek and Woolwich, the river flows on either bank between Kentish soil; for the north shore consists of a bit of the East Ham Level (another one of the low-lying reclaimed stretches), included for some inscrutable reason in the county of Kent. The Albert Dock begins here, three miles in length, lined on both sides with P. and O., British India, New Zealand Shipping Company, and other great steamers, and lighted the whole way with the electric light—a striking sight on a dark evening. Two red-brick Queen Anne buildings by Norman Shaw abut the stream with long piers run out far into the river. Round Gallion Point the Thames narrows suddenly, and the long river-front of Woolwich comes immediately into full view. The Arsenal, the Dockyard, the basin, the many wharves, the tall cranes, the ranges of storehouses, all rise one after another in murky magnificence under the red evening sky, with Shooter's Hill closing in the view to landward, crowned by the ugly turret of Severndroog Castle. The pall of London is beginning

GALLION'S REACH.

to cover the valley of the Thames on either side now; the dense fog hangs gloomily over the Plaistow and East Ham Levels; the forest of masts that throngs the Victoria and Albert Docks shows dimly through the mist upon the opposite shore; and the mysterious factories of North Woolwich dispense black curls of smoke and wonderful stenches over the whole surrounding dusky reaches.

At Woolwich for the first time we meet the dumb barge in full force, though a few of the type may now and again be found as low down the river as Gravesend itself. Your dumb barge has no mast, sail, or rudder, but consists simply of a great oblong floating box, with a pair of long sweeps for sole locomotive apparatus. She moves broadside on for the most part, carries sixty to a hundred tons, and gets perpetually in everyone's way—all the efforts of her motley crew (who are incongruously clad in long coat and soft hat) being spent solely in trying to keep her in the middle of the tide. Drifting is her one and only mode of motion, and she drives casually across the hawse of anchored craft, or gets a bounding cannon off the bow of a moving steamer by way of putting her in the right path, with a skill which nothing but long practice could by any possibility render feasible. She is not loved indeed by other vessels. "Man alive," cried the skipper of one such craft to our gentle remonstrances after a serious bump, "she hurt you! Why, she wouldn't crack an egg!" The lugboat is yet another type of dumb craft, clinker built, and sharp fore and aft, much smaller than the dumb barge, and used for the carriage of tea,

silk, and all sorts of valuable goods. There is, or was, moreover, a third breed, the dumb lighter, now perhaps almost extinct. Strangest of all, however, among the craft not properly belonging to the Thames itself are the stray monkey boats from the Midlands and Birmingham, painted over with rude landscapes and historical pictures. These peaceful craft are by no means happy outside the quiet waters of the Midland canals, and the brown-faced women and dusky children with their cotton sun-bonnets seem sadly out of place on the lower river, as though longing to be towed along once more by the old horse on the dull canal-path. The Thames bargee seems to take a special delight in teasing and tormenting these his alien step-brothers with all the vigorous chaff incidental to his noble profession.

Woolwich has passed through many vicissitudes. The great gun place was once a pretty rural waterside town, and its common still preserves some dusty memory of its first estate. But the long river-front forms the very life and soul of modern Woolwich, whose name at once proclaims it a *eik, wich*, or anchorage station of the old heathen Scandinavian pirates. The Dockyard was the older of its two principal establishments, now eclipsed by *the* Arsenal (there is none other in the British dominions), a vast dreary area of chimney-stacks, furnaces, steam-hammers, timber-stacks, riband-saws, hydraulic machines, ammunition carriages, and other cunningly devised instruments of torture for assailing the eyes, ears, noses, lungs, organs, and sense-terminals generally of the unhappy visitor duly provided with a ticket of committal for that purpose from the constituted authorities of the War Office or other recognised official to that end appointed. Those who will may consent to be led through all that whirring, hissing maze of wheels and bands and forges and gearings; to inspect the four-mile circuit of gun factories, and laboratories, and carriage departments, and mortising works; to hear learned explanations of welding coils, forging breeches, boring naves, planing felloes, tenoning powder-cases, constructing fuzes, and all the rest of it. For our own part, we prefer greatly to lie up quietly beside the arsenal wharves, with their grim gaunt cranes, their din of heavy metal, and their stout ordnance store-ships lying to be loaded heavily alongside, in solemn order of departmental red tape. The gossip of long-shore loungers by the old Dockyard, the busy throng of steamers and

merchantmen and colliers and tugs in the middle stream, are more delightful to eye and ear than the pyramids of shot and shell, the millions of Martini-Henry bullets, and the burst and shattered guns of the "hospital" or "cemetery," which form the staple sights of the great Arsenal.

More pathetic far than broken guns or exploded shells is the sight of the helpless fragments of a once mighty frigate, now being dismembered at the ship-breaking yard for timber and metal. Everybody who realises

THE ALBERT DOCK.

the life of the sea, the individuality and personality of a big ship, cannot help recognising the underlying pathos of her final sad calamity. In no other product of man's handicraft does ruin so much resemble death as in the case of a great and famous vessel. Even historic buildings are only, after all, inert masses of stone and mortar; but the ship truly walks the waters "like a thing of life," and has a distinct vitality of her own which every sailor instinctively feels and always acts upon. Nay, it has formulated itself in the very form and structure of our ordinarily genderless English language; for while every other manufactured object is merely *it*, the ship retains her ancient feminine personality intact as *she*. It is not merely that she has motion and energy, while all terrestrial buildings are fixed and

immobile; the surviving gender of the ship goes deeper down a good deal in the unravelled and unanalysable consciousness of sailors than such mere surface reasoning as that. The ship has spontaneity, has a mind of her own, has a distinct individual power of initiating motion, has sometimes even a sort of self-will or saucy spirit of opposition to her skipper's wishes. The sailor feels in his heart that his ship is not merely an inert thing: it is, to some extent, almost a living and volitional being. Steamers, even, are much more *it* than sailing vessels; they act passively, like mere machines. You turn on steam, and they go ahead; you turn it off, and they stand stock-still; you reverse the engine, and they back mechanically, without a single plunge or a moment's hesitation. But a sailing vessel has her own little personal tricks of manner; her particular behaviour under every kind of wind or weather, or sea or current; and the sailor knows well all these small points in her temper or her character, and is proud of her for having them, and of himself for having learnt exactly how to humour or manage them. Her very faults help to deepen the fallacious resemblance to purposive or intelligent action. She has her failings, as we mortals ourselves have; she is wilful or hasty, or slow or obstinate. You seem to be dealing with an eager, high-spirited, affectionate animal, that needs now to be curbed and reined in, now again to be spurred and urged forward, and now once more to be carefully cajoled and threatened, and petted and humoured, to make her rouse her energies for some serious effort on which her own life and that of all her crew are irretrievably staked and hazarded.

And when the ship is not merely one that has served her time obscurely in some minor service, but is a great and once honoured officer of the State, with a name familiarly known to hundreds of thousands of Englishmen—a *Bellerophon*, a *Shannon*, an *Agincourt*, an *Abonkir*, an *Iron Duke*, a *Minotaur*, a *Warrior*, a *Polyphemus*—the sense of her individuality and personal existence becomes even stronger and deeper than ever. The *Royal Sovereign*, that "Golden Devil" of the Dutch, which played the devil indeed with their fleets during the great Cromwellian wars, and which was originally built at this very dockyard of Woolwich; the *Royal George*, another Woolwich-built heroine, that heeled over at her moorings with all

her crew on board; the *Victory*, which carried Nelson to death and glory at Trafalgar; all these have a kind of historical identity almost as real as that of the great commanders who once sailed in them. And when such a ship has at last to be towed, like the fighting *Téméraire*, to her last moorings, and broken up helplessly for the mere value of her dead materials, the pathos, all fanciful and imaginative as it actually is, yet rises to a very high point of sensible feeling. We look upon the last sad obsequies almost as we might look upon the spectacle of a noble charger—say, Wellington's Copenhagen—blind and lame, and feeble and aged, being led along in his weak last days to a knacker's shambles. The *Puffin* does due reverence to the worn-out old frigate as she passes before her final resting-place; and the *Puffin's* crew remove the contemplative pipe from their lips, and give a last farewell with voice and pencil to her desecrated timbers.

BREAKING UP AN OLD FRIGATE.

GREENWICH HOSPITAL

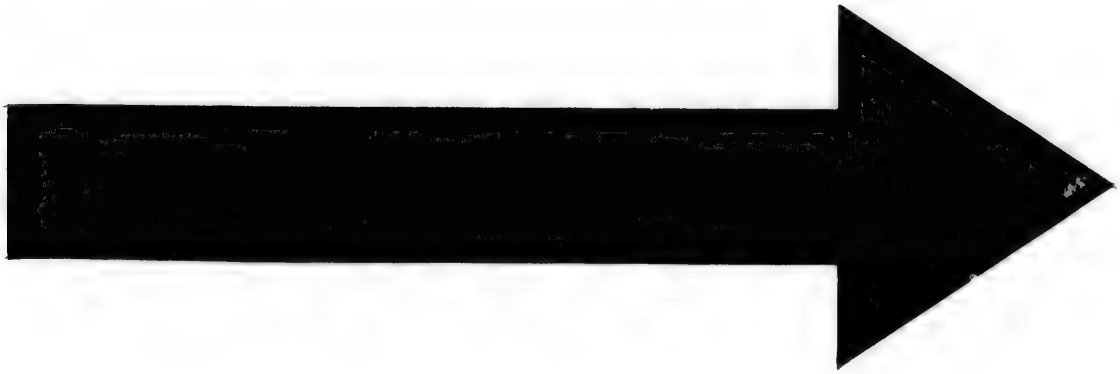
CHAPTER X

NEARING LONDON

THE district lying immediately to the west of Woolwich constitutes the ancient estuary of the river Lea, the boundary stream between Essex and Middlesex; and the whole of this wide flat, now drained and embanked under the various names of the Isle of Dogs, Bugsby's Marshes, and the Plaistow Level, remained till almost historic times a vast brackish pool, covered twice daily throughout its whole extent by the mounting tide. Even as late as the days when the legionaries of Aulus Plautius marched down Watling Street to fortify afresh on Roman principles the stockaded village by the *dun* of London, they saw before them a wide expanse of marsh and mud-bank, which at high water assumed the character of a flooded fiord or arm of the sea. Dion, indeed, considered that the Thames here emptied itself into the ocean, so broad and open was the great spreading surface of that yet unbridled tidal mere. No drains then intersected the reedy flats with their rhines and sluices; no dykes then retained the water within fixed and narrow artificial limits. One arm of the huge wash, constituted

Black Diamonds, Bugsby's Hole.

Black Diamonds Bogsby's hole
Allan W.



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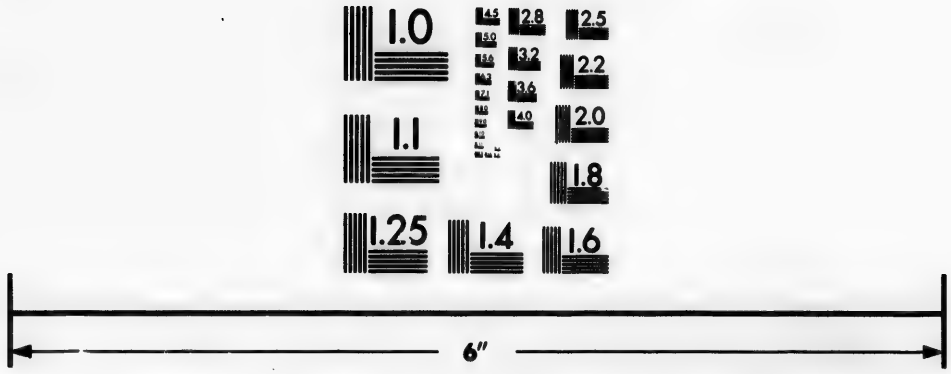

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by the confluence of the two rivers, stretched northward for many miles along the valley of the Lea; the other extended westward along the reaches of the now stone-girt Thames as far as the boundless salt morasses of Battersea and Lambeth. A great lagoon, in fact, then covered almost the whole of the modern metropolitan area, and from its solitary flats rose at long intervals the marshy eyots and shallow hithes which afterwards formed the nuclei of the little intrusive colonies of English pirates. Only one promontory of solid land projected into the midst of this seemingly boundless waste of waters; and that was the ridge of tertiaries thrown out from the high ground of Hampstead on the north, and terminating southward in the Celtic *dun* or petty hill region that lies between the valley of the Fleet river and the ditches once spread beneath the mound of the Tower. Everything else in modern London or its riverside suburbs has been slowly recovered from the tidal Thames by drainage or artificial embankments; and the lagoon still remains as a wide low-lying sheet of alluvial silt, scattered among the occasional rising hillocks of more solid and ancient tertiary deposits.

By slow degrees the combined estuary of the Lea and the Thames has been reclaimed and drained through artificial processes. A traveller sailing up stream from the Gaulish coast, by the accustomed ancient channels of the Wantsum and the Swale, saw on either hand nothing but low marshes and tidal flats, save in a few rare spots where the chalk approached the bank of the river, till he reached the projecting *dun* or hillock of Celtic London itself. That low promontory, rising some fifty feet above high-tide mark in the Thames, and divided into two minor heights (Ludgate Hill and Cornhill, with Tower Hill) by the petty ravine of the Wallbrook, formed the first spot in the tidal mere where he could bring his ship close up to a firm shore; and the reach of the river which stretches in front of this natural landing-place bears to this day the characteristic Celtic name of the Pool. On this favoured spot, high up the longest tidal stream in all Europe, surrounded by the deep estuary of the united rivers to the east and south, defended by the Fleet morasses on the west, and backed up to northward by the vast fen or moor which gives a name even now to Fenchurch, Finsbury, and Moorgate, the native Celtic inhabitants had

built their stockaded *dun* or hill fortress. The Romans seized at once upon the splendid opportunity for a trading city afforded by this nearest landing-place among the morasses of the middle Thames. Before the rising of Boadicea even, Roman London had grown into a flourishing port, and as the chief entrepot of the whole island, it formed the centre whence the great network of roads and causeways diverged in long radiating spokes to the furthest extremities of the Britannic provinces. Doubtless the same great engineers who planned that vast system of solid highways and the massive walls of ancient London, also designed the first barriers to check the tidal waters of the Lea and Thames. At any rate, there is hardly any other age to which the original embankments can be with any probability assigned; and the existence of a Roman suburb at Southwark proves that some portion at least of the wide morass had been reclaimed during the flourishing days of the provincial empire.

The district between whose high banks we are sailing slowly to-day, winding our way with difficulty among steamers, barges, colliers, and merchantmen, up the tedious stretches of Bugsby's Reach, and on to Greenwich, forms a portion of the tract thus early wrested from the stagnant pools of the sea and the river. But the reclamation was not fully accomplished or secured by any one single generation. Time after time the water burst its banks once more, and very high tides made frequent breaches along the most exposed parts of the river-frontage. During the Middle Ages the great monasteries of Lesnes and Stratford, and the nunnery of Barking Abbey, undertook the work of preserving the low lands. In the reign of Henry VIII. the long projecting flat near Leaness, known by the euphonious title of Bugsby's Marshes, was inundated by a high tide, and recovered by two Italians named Aconzio and Battista Castiglione. The north bank was breached at Wapping and Limehouse as late as the sixteenth century; and the dreary waste of the Isle of Dogs, the main block of the Lea estuary, has been submerged many times, and with difficulty recovered. Even to this day floods continually cause great damage in Lambeth and Southwark, while the low districts above and below are liable to considerable damage whenever high tides happen to coincide with stormy or very wet weather.

On the other hand, advantage has been taken of these reclaimed alluvial tracts all along the artificial course of the dammed-in river for the construction of docks, into which the water can easily be admitted on account of their extremely low and depressed level. Beginning at Gravesend, for example, the New Tilbury Docks have been carved out of the flat and misty expanse of the West Tilbury Marshes. Next, the Plaistow and East Ham levels supply a convenient site for the Victoria and Albert Docks, which really replace the estuary of the Lea on its eastern shore. The western estuary, now the Isle of Dogs, is cut off by the East India and West India Docks, occupying the depression of a former tidal creek or backwater, like the one which still severs Canvey Island from the Essex main. Just opposite these, on the Surrey shore, the ancient marshes behind Rotherhithe give room for the Commercial Docks and the Grand Surrey. Similarly, the gap between Wapping and the Tower Hill affords a natural opening for the London Docks; the St. Katherine's, close by, being somewhat more strictly artificial, and the result of far deeper and more difficult excavations. Thus a large part of the common estuary of the Thames and Lea has first been carefully reclaimed by formidable embankments, and then once more laid under water for the needs of the increasing shipping by a converse process of excavation and flooding.

As we thread our way cautiously through the manifold perils of the great deep between Woolwich and Greenwich, the aspect of Nature (considerably modified just hereabout by art) grows more and more Londony at every tack. The Atlas stands close by here—a pair of great derricks for unloading steam cutters, with three big arms on either side, which wave ceaselessly day and night, swinging the coals out of two steamers together at a time. The coal is shot into barges which are brought up thick and fast, and drop astern into The Tiers, where they wait by thousands in a long line. Acres of them stretch along the river here; in fact, the whole of Bugsby's Reach is entirely given up to Atlas Numbers One and Two, with their attendant train of tugs and barges. A huge stack of bones stands ashore, close to some dust-heaps, where women and children are picking out the rags and washing them clean in the filthy river. Over the way are chemical works and varnish manufactories with their

noisome stench. The air is full of dense black smoke, and a black dew of coal-dust falls for ever from the derricks on the polluted stream. By the side of Bow Creek stands the Trinity House, with rows of buoys, striped and chequered, red and white and black, every shape and size, in picturesque confusion. Steam fog-horns and experimental lighthouses complete the picture of this earthly chaos.

We pass the ferry-houses of the military ferry—everything around Woolwich is more or less persistently pervaded by the ubiquitous mark of the broad arrow—and the building sheds of Charlton pier, and Charlton sluice and sand wharf, and the answering sluice on the northern bank, which serves to let out the accumulated water from the narrow strip of artificial land between the river and the Victoria Docks. The point to westward is Hookness—again the Scandinavian has left *his* broad arrow, the mark of the Beast, as his contemporaries might well have thought it—the philological evidence of his frequent little cruises up stream to extort his Danegeld from the wealthy merchant burghers of Anglo-Saxon London. The opening in front of us, as we head for Blackwall Point, shows the modern narrowed *débouchure* of the Lea river: Bow Creek, the sailors call it, in their maritime slang, from the suburb of Bow upon the Mile End Road, a little to the northward. It forms the boundary between Essex and Middlesex—the point at which the East Saxon immigrants were checked in their westward onslaughts upon the great merchant city by the marshes and levels of the then half-reclaimed alluvial tract. The district beyond the Lea, the modern county of Middlesex, formed afterwards the minor principality of the Middlesaxons, dependent on the Essex kings, doubtless the same little group of clan-communities whose settlements we have already noticed at Wapping, Kensington, Paddington, and the other suburban patronymic villages. But the great city itself, secure within its Roman walls, probably remained an independent trading commonwealth in close alliance with the East Saxon chiefs, whose bishopstool was afterwards placed on the hill of St. Pauls; for London, in the restricted sense, was never a part of Middlesex, whose county town even to this day is reckoned to be at Brentford. The squalid modern suburbs beyond the Lea, lying for the most part in the populous parish of West Ham, are commonly known by the

Showery Day, Greenwich Reach.

Greenwich Reach

colloquial title of "London over the Border." It must always be remembered in looking at the shrunken Lea of Bow Creek at the present day, and comparing it with the immense estuary which once spread uninterruptedly from Millwall to Woolwich, that the New River (cut by Sir Hugh Middleton, in the reign of Elizabeth) has long diverted by far the greater part of its natural feeders for the water-supply of London, so that the present fresh-water stream is far smaller than its original volume, even if unaugmented by the tidal wave that swept of old over the entire alluvial mud-flats of the Plaistow Level and the Isle of Dogs.

Rounding Leaness, we find ourselves at once in Greenwich Reach, at longitude nothing, as our skipper loves to impress upon us in due form, and steer straight down the line of 0°, with the Observatory facing us on its hill in front, and the lower entrance to the West India Docks and the abortive City Canal fronting the river on our right. The bank bristles on both sides with oil-mills, telegraph-cable works, and torpedo-boats. The view on either hand commands impartially the tall warehouses and iron shipbuilding slips of the Isle of Dogs, or the equally ugly level of Bugsby's Marshes. (Who was Bugsby, by the way, and when did he "flourish"? —say rather, drag out his life?—for if he lived in the district that now bears his name down to an easy immortality, he must have suffered from life-long ague and interminable depression of spirits, prompting him to drown his sorrows in his own reach, or in the flowing bowl that tempts him to-day from the waterside publics of the Isle of Dogs.) So at last we find ourselves safely at Greenwich, passing the familiar façade of the great naval hospital, and the enticing river-front of the too attractive and apolaustic "Ship." Fond lingering visions of devilled whitebait and of the famous crab-jelly float vaguely through the fourth left convolution of our cerebral hemispheres (that, I believe, is the latest scientific localisation of gustatory imaginings in the map of the brain); but what would the eminently respectable, swallow-tailed and white-chokered waiters of the "Ship" or the "Trafalgar" say to a trio of brown-faced and sea-bespattered men, in woollen jerseys and blue sailor trousers, who have been knocking about for a fortnight past, in all weathers and at all hours, through the surf and spray of the lower river or the open estuary? Not for such guests as us is the

capacious table spread in the long hall overlooking the river platform; not for such guests as us does the *chef* of the once humble shrimpy waterside tavern prepare his dainty *menu* on his sumptuous gilt-edged cards. We will put off dining in state till we have resumed the decent frock-coat and shining tall hat of Bond Street respectability, and will meanwhile content ourselves with a hunk of Greenwich bread and a slice of cold beef, washed down with good sound bitter, on the inexpensive simple deck of the hospitable and unexacting *Puffin*.

The very name of Greenwich shows it at once to have been always a green spot beside the river-bank, where the foliage of the trees that cover the slopes contrasted pleasantly with the grey misty marshes of all the surrounding tidal pools. It was those ubiquitous Norsemen who christened the hithe by its present title, as the termination *wich* or *vik* sufficiently proves. Vikings themselves (that is to say, men of the viks or inlets—the proper English form is Wicking, and the word has nothing on earth to do with king, or sea-king, or anything of the sort, being merely a form derived from the root *vik* by the addition of the patronymic or possessive termination *ing*), they loved to linger among the creeks and reaches of the tidal streams, especially in the neighbourhood of rich trading towns such as early London, "which is the mart of many nations," says Bede, some generations earlier, "resorting to it by sea and land." The manor was granted by a niece of King Alfred to the Abbey of Ghent, in which she was interested through her marriage with Earl Baldwin of Flanders, and was probably the earliest held in England by any foreign monastery. When the alien priories were suppressed by that stout Englishman, Henry V., the greater part of Greenwich was transferred to the Carthusians of Shene, who held the manor till the Dissolution. But on a part of the land reserved by the Crown for itself, Duke Humphrey of Gloucester (the famous personage with whom so many dinnerless folk are still supposed to sup) built his palace of Pleasaunce, the precursor of the modern stately hospital. It was he, too, who enclosed Greenwich Park, and erected the watch-tower of Mirefleur on the hill now occupied by the great Observatory. The palace was a royal residence throughout the Lancastrian, Tudor, and Stuart periods; the birthplace and chief residence of Henry VIII., of Mary, and

of Elizabeth. The great Queen, in whose "spacious days" English sailors laid the foundation of that world-wide colonial empire under whose weight the "weary Titan" England now staggers half oppressed, loved to watch from the oriels of her palace the ships of her revived sea-dogs, her Drakes, her Frobishers, her Raleighs, and her Baffins, starting forth on their adventurous voyages, "discovering kings and countries new"; and often, "as their pinnaces passed Greenwich," waved her own hand to them as a token of farewell before their final departure for the unknown coasts of Guiana or the ice-bound channels of the North-West Passage.

The existing hospital was begun by Charles II., who only completed the present west wing; and after the great naval battle of La Hogue, Queen Mary decided to convert the palace into a sailors' hospital. Wren prepared the designs after her death, and sylvan John Evelyn laid the foundation stone. The hospital was opened in 1705, and has remained ever since perhaps the chief integral part of our mental picture of the tidal Thames, so closely has it interwoven itself with all our memories of pleasant summer trips up and down the great grey river. There was something very touching and appropriate in the idea of putting the retreat for disabled seamen thus on the very bank of the main nautical thoroughfare of the world, where they could behold the stately ships sailing on every day to their haven by the crowded piers of London; so that one could hardly help regretting, from the picturesque and poetical side at least, the change of destination which has turned the huge building into a Royal Naval College. The pensioners were prosaic enough to prefer the system of receiving a fixed allowance at their own houses, and the largest palace in England, except Windsor, was finally emptied because a pack of old salts did not care to live in it. There is something after all in that sense of individuality which thus makes even the ordinary A.B. seaman choose rather his own little lodging all to himself than part possession of a magnificent marine residence, with an unrivalled frontage on the tidal Thames.

The terrace and hospital, though they belong to a somewhat awsome age, are not without a certain imposing grandeur of their own. As a practical museum of post-Renaissance English architecture, they possess a very singular interest indeed: for, beginning with the Queen's House in the

rear, built by Inigo Jones for Henrietta Maria, and ending with Wren's façade at the south-western corner, we have a regular succession of the works of palace architects, from the days of Inigo to those of Vanbrugh, and even (terrible bathos!) of "Athenian" Stuart. The best view of hospital and park is the one we get from the middle of the river, but the "prospects" from the park itself are of course far wider and more general, extending (if it were ever clear enough to see) as far as Windsor. Turner's famous drawing, in the South Kensington, was taken from just below the base of the Observatory. But let us be perfectly frank with one another; the present writer has never once beheld the inside of the Park! a shortcoming which he lays entirely at the doors of the "Ship" and the "Trafalgar." For how many of us who run down to Greenwich by train or steamer ever see any more of Greenwich town itself—a bustling waterside port of more than 100,000 people—than just the noble river-front of the massive hospital, and the snowy-white table-cloths of those two seductive and luxurious taverns? In old days the citizens of London rowed down leisurely in their barges, or took their six-pennyworth in the tilt-boats, to Greenwich pier, on whole holidays in the City, admiring the green fields (alas! where now departed?) and the busy shipping as they went; they dined decorously off a dish of whitebait and a bottle of Spanish wine, and then strolled along the river-front by the huge hospital, or paraded through the elm and chestnut avenues of Greenwich Park. But nowadays, in this hurrying, scurrying, worrying age, we snatch the tag-end of an afternoon from the pressure of engagements, and run down by the last train that will just bring us in to the portals of the "Ship" on the very stroke of seven. By the time we have discussed the *souchés*, and salads, and scallops, and jellies of that endless carte, what leisure is there left to admire the beauties of Nature from the lofty site of Duke Humphrey's tower? Why, this is really the first occasion, here on the deck of the *Puffin*, when one has ever had the opportunity even of taking a good look at the great palace itself, and the pier beside it, and the long-shore folk who crowd the streets, and the queer ships and storehouses by the water's edge, and the big merchantmen sauntering down the mid-stream, and the thousand and one other quaint sights of a thriving, bustling, maritime town. By what strange steps that little old-fashioned

Straw Barge, off Greenwich

waterside tavern, the original "Ship Inn," where Londoners came to eat whitebait and flounders, and drink a dish of tea, must have developed into the lordly hotel that now fronts the grimy river with its ill-assorted magnificence! What a curious evolution from small beginnings to overfed magnitude we have in that queer history! And how much wiser our ancestors really were in this matter than we are! For what used to be a pleasant afternoon river picnic has degenerated at last into a luxurious, wasteful, ostentatious feast, followed by an indigestion all that night, and a solemn resolution next morning never to go to a fish dinner at Greenwich again—till the next time one gets an invitation.

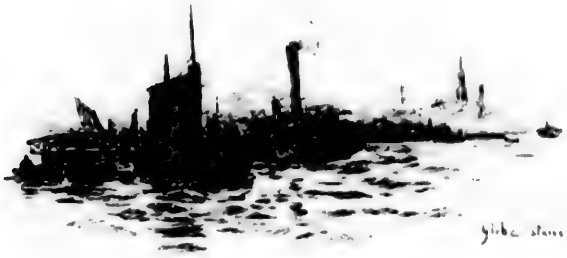
The little creek that joins the Thames between Greenwich and Deptford is the Ravensbourne, another probable Scandinavian name; and just beyond its junction with the main river lies the town of Deptford, "the deep fiord," the termination being employed (as at Wexford, Waterford, and a few other British stations) in its Norse and not in its English sense. There is not, and never has been, a ford at this spot. Always a great shipping place, Deptford is especially noticeable in the history, not only of the tidal Thames, but of English navigation generally, as the original home of the Trinity Board, the supreme authority in all matters relating to lighthouses, buoys, beacons, and the like questions pertaining to the safety and security of our ocean highways. Like most other English institutions—from Parliament to the "Ship" at Greenwich—the Trinity Board has been a slow product of natural evolution from very small and humble beginnings. Henry VII., the patron of Sebastian Cabot, and first founder of our colonial empire, took a great personal interest in the development of the English shipping industry, whose vessels passed continually in front of his own Pleasaunce windows at Greenwich Palace. He was minded, therefore, to grant to the shipmen and mariners of England a charter for the foundation in the parish church of Deptford of a guild or brotherhood of the Holy Trinity and St. Clement, with authority to make bye-laws for the advantage and increase of English shipping. The Honourable Brotherhood of the Trinity House continued to hold their meetings in an old hall at Deptford till the end of the last century, when a new Trinity House was erected for their use on Tower Hill, in the immediate neighbourhood of the Pool and the

great mass of London vessels. To this day the Elder and Younger Brethren of the Trinity House preserve in their style and formulæ some relics of the ancient simplicity of King Henry's guild. Nor has the old connection with Deptford entirely ceased even now, for the Board maintains two hospitals in the town for the benefit of decayed pilots and superannuated ship-masters.

Except for its forests of masts and its waterside flavours of tar and oil, modern Deptford is not in itself a pleasant or an attractive spot in which to linger. Once upon a time (a long time ago, one would say to look at it—yet no longer really than the beginning of this century) a rare wild-flower grew among the marshy precincts of the Ravensbourne, still known to botanists in its few remaining English haunts as the Deptford pink. There are no Deptford pinks at Deptford now, and inquiries about them, addressed to natives of that dismal slum, have been known to be misinterpreted as referring in all probability to some famous prize-fighter. "The Deptford Pink, sir? Never 'eerd tell of 'im; but like enough he's beknown at the 'Three Jolly Tars' or the 'Seaman's Fair Haven.'" Everything at Deptford, indeed, has "suffered a sea change," not of the happiest. The shore has been lined with marine storehouses and petty wharves; the Dockyard has been converted into a Foreign Cattle Market; the grounds of Saye's Court, John Evelyn's riverside home, where Peter of Russia drove his wheelbarrow through the hedges that the author of Sylva had planted and trimmed with such tender care—the grounds of Saye's Court have fallen into worse hands than even the great unwashed Muscovite's, for, after having first been turned into a victualling yard, they have at last descended to be the site of the parish workhouse. "To what base uses!" Modern Deptford is as grimy, gloomy, and dreary a place as you would wish to look at; and yet, with a little haze and a good mass of masts in the foreground, it will look as beautiful here from Greenwich, when once a deft brush has begun to limn it for our delectation, as the Grand Canal itself of a misty evening, when the haze from the lagoon is just beginning to rise over the flats of Murano, and to tone with its misty glory the solid stone façades of that great curving line of palaces and landing-places.

There is often something truly Venetian, indeed, about the aspect of the river near London on a calm summer night. After all, barges and ships are much alike the whole world over; the sun is the same on the Thames as on the Adriatic; and if one had only a few lateen sails in the foreground, it would often be difficult to say whether a particular sketch had been studied at Deptford or on the way to the Lido. Just look at the beautiful tail-piece to this present chapter, for example, and then say honestly whether you could have found out by your unaided intelligence near which of the two it was painted—by the Riva at Venice, or by the Isle of Dogs.

THE ISLE OF DOGS.



GLOBE STAIRS.

CHAPTER XI.

TO LONDON BRIDGE.

IMEHOUSE REACH carries the weary little *Puffin* on its unsavoury bosom from Deptford dockyard (now abandoned) up to the very entrance of the Pools themselves. We are now fairly within the grip of the actual, undeniable, modern London. On our right lies the Isle of Dogs, its hither bank consisting of Millwall, whose very name, like those of Wapping Wall, Rotherhithe Wall, and Bermondsey Wall, a little further up the river, testifies to its origin in the easy roadway formed by the level top of the restraining embankment. On our left stretches the low patch of reclaimed ground over which the interlacing and converging lines of the South London, East London, South Eastern, and Brighton and South Coast railways cross and recross one another in a perfect maze of inextricable confusion, through which the puffing engines, carried over one another's heads on long brick viaducts, seem perpetually and ineffectually tilting at each other in a vague endeavour to make two parallel planes meet at a definite point considerably short of infinity. A little further on, the bend of land between the Pool and Limehouse Reach has been almost entirely flooded to form the Commercial Docks, with their endless basins and ramifications, and the big timber-ponds of the Grand Surrey lying just behind them. It is a strange grimy land, this angle of excavated low-level soil stretching away from Rotherhithe to Deptford; a land of

storehouses, and swing bridges, and jutting piers, and railway wharves, and desolate unbuilt patches, backed up in every part by the forest of masts that rises high into the sky like a veritable woodland from the long succession of intercommunicating pools and basins. Whoever wishes to gauge at once the unspeakable squalor and the boundless wealth of London cannot do better than walk at one stretch from the Bridge, through the lanes and alleys of Bermondsey, and round the girdling curve of Rotherhithe Street and Trinity Street (which here run round in a long arch parallel with the river's bend) to the sheds and basins of the great foreign live-meat market at Deptford Victualling Yard.

Rotherhithe itself—aboriginally known to most of us, no doubt, merely by the fact (or, rather, fiction) that Lemuel Gulliver, surgeon, once lived there—formed in early English times one of the hithes or landing-places that rose like half-drowned eyots from the flooded morass of the southern bank. A little stream, the Rother, once flowed down into the Thames on the very border of Kent and Surrey, a namesake of that other Sussex Rother which runs past Rothersbridge (*ferro-strative* Robertsbridge) to join the sea through the very similar tidal flats of Romney Marshes. At either extremity Kent is severed from the adjoining counties by a Rother brook. The hithe that just lifted its head above the surrounding lagoon was called, *facti de nomine*, Rotherhithe; just as Lambeth was once Lamb-hithe or Loam-hithe, Stepney was Steben-hithe, and even Erith was Æer-hithe. A mere lift of muddy islet even in the old days, it has been turned by modern commerce into a narrow strip of dirty land, stretching in long low line between the serried masts of the Thames on the one hand, and the serried masts of the docks on the other.

The Commercial Docks (as though any other docks were sentimental or professional or scientific!) were specially constructed in the first instance for the Greenland trade, but are now mainly resorted to by northern timber vessels. Stacks of timber stretch as far as the eye can reach; the wholesome smell of deal and pine perfumes the air and recalls the forests of Norway and Canada. By a curious coincidence, too, these headquarters of northern trade have an old traditional connection with the Scandinavian folk, for it is said that the Commercial Docks themselves are the beginning of a

canal cut by Cnut, the Dane, for his long-ships, during his blockade of London, so as to enable his fleet to avoid a line of stakes which the burghers had planted in the river to obstruct his pathway up stream to Lambeth. As we get higher up the river, the tiers of vessels increase in depth—four and even six abreast—lining the bank on both sides, and accompanied by the attendant fleet of barges and small craft. These tiers narrow the channel in the middle to very few yards in width, and the lane of water thus left is often packed full of drifting craft, dumb barges, tug-boats, farmers' barges stacked with mountains of hay, and noisy lighters, all going up stream together broadside on, with heads and tails jostling each other in quaint confusion. The steamers shove through just as they might through pack-ice, and now and then get wedged and have to drift helplessly with the pack. It is a wonderful sight to see, and one well worthy of a cunning pencil.

Wapping, which lies on our right as we wind our way up through the crowded stream round Cuckold's Point, is the very limb and centre of the English sailor interest. Round Wapping Old Stairs all the romance of that sentimental melodramatic British tar who never really existed anywhere has by common consent been always supposed to whirl and eddy. The black-eyed Susans of romance, and the Wapping Sues of sober reality, here find a local habitation and a name. Not that they are actually "airy nothings": far from it: the sailor's lass of stern prosaic fact is a comfortable, somewhat full-faced body, whose beauty, as Mr. W. S. Gilbert remarks, instead of being merely skin-deep, "lies in layers on her bones." That Wapping must once have been an island, like so many other places in the London alluvial tract, is certain, not only from the existence of the depression behind it, in which the London Docks now stand, but also from the fact that during the excavations for the St. Katherine's Docks the workmen dug out the rude hulls of ancient ships from the buried mud, showing that a branch or backwater of the Thames once ran in the rear of Wapping from Tower Hill to Shadwell Basin. Indeed, "Wapping Town" itself is but a narrow strip of half-artificial land, the utmost area of this low eyot, reclaimed by the Roman embankment of Wapping Wall from the floods and high tides of the Thames lagoon.

The Pool at the present day certainly presents the most extraordinary mass of living and moving, or inert and serried shipping to be seen in any harbour of the whole world. "The traveller bound up stream to London for the first time," says the guide-book, "cannot fail to be impressed by the singular magnificence of the scene that now opens up before him." Indeed he cannot. So great an expanse of fog and vessels can never before have

LOWER EAST SMITHFIELD.

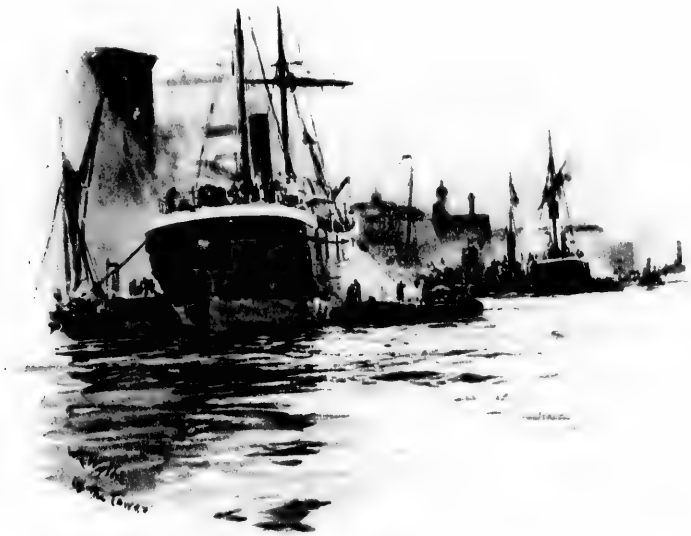
met his astonished gaze; so much thick smoke, such solid tawny mist, such festering piles of marine stores, such endless taverns and ships and store-houses, such cranes and masts and winches and ferries, such noisy tugs and solemn steamers and helpless barges and calm self-possessed river-craft, such grime and bustle and din and stenches, can never before have assailed him at one time by all the several vulnerable portals of his seven senses. Masts, masts, masts! funnels, funnels, funnels! as far as eye can see through that semi-transparent mixture they call the air in London, over that dilute sewage they call the river—nothing but ships in every possible variety, toiling and

moiling in mid-stream with flowing tide, or moored immovable in military order among the square squadrons—a vast panorama of that wonderful epitome of English civilisation, the Tidal Thames. Here, indeed, is all that is most picturesque and distinctive in our strange, sordid, mercantile life. Not Nile, flowing past granite temples and polished Memnons, with bright-striped sails dropping slowly down its lazy lower stream; not tawny Tiber, gliding by the Forum or the Vatican to the huge castled spit of San Angelo; not Seine, running between white stone quays, by the towers of Notre Dame, the huge straight river-front of the Louvre, or the gilded dome of the gaudy Invalides; but English Thames himself, greyest and gloomiest of earthly rivers, bounded by grimy Wapping to the north and grimy Rotherhithe to the south, and bearing on his turbid bosom, in inextricable confusion, the ships that carry Britain and all her fortunes. For here we are in the very High Street of the sea; making our way up the central roadway, Heaven only knows how, and looking in awe and wonder at the tiers upon tiers of compact shipping moored in endless rank on either side. If any man wants to see at one glance what our English civilisation is really like, let him drop down the river at the turn of the tide, and gaze at the seething mass of seafaring humanity that lives and moves and has its being in the dank tarry atmosphere of the Lower Pool off Wapping Old Stairs.

We cross Thames Tunnel, and pass Cherry Garden Pier, where no cherries now grow visibly to the naked eye. On our left lies Bermondsey, classic home of cholera and fever, where the much-debated "germs" of those man-eating bacteria used once to be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, unchecked by such unwarrantable intrusions on their liberty of action as main-drainage works or sanitary precautions. Things are better now, people say, and piously believe; but, even so, Bermondsey can hardly claim to be an eligible family residence for a young couple about to marry. It is a mere nest of all the unsavoury and unwholesome trades carried on in London; a haunt of tanners, glue-makers, match-manufacturers, and leather dressers, who pour the refuse of their noisome handicrafts into the shallow muddy water-courses which everywhere intersect or underlie its narrow alleys. The tidal overflow of the Thames floods these reeking streams and culverts

The Upper Pool.

twice a day, leaving the refuse to rot and wither in the mud meanwhile. All the sheepskins of London come here to be sold and dressed, adding their doubtful perfume to the native rankness of the crowded lanes. It is difficult as one looks at this festering mass of squalid poverty and densely-clustered houses to realise the real original meaning of that familiar name.



OFF THE TOWER.

For Bermondsey is by origin Beormund's Ig, Beormund's Ey, or island; the marshy eyot in the Thames where some unknown early English settler, Beormund (perhaps a Wapping from across the river), built himself ages since a little hut upon the reed-clad bank. Parts of the district must have been isolated by water at a far later date, for Jacob's Island is the title of a block long known for its unenviable notoriety, and possessing a name of purely modern English origin. Indeed, the backwaters of the Thames were still very numerous even long after the erection of the Roman embankments; and the islands cut off by them are to this day generally marked by the

old English termination *ey*, an isle (of which eyot is the diminutive), often vulgarised and corrupted into *ea*. Thus, besides Bermondsey, we have also in the London district Chelsea, once Chesel-ey, the gravel isle; Battersea, once St. Peter's Ey; and Thorn Ey—or, as it is oftener called, with needless reduplication, Thorney Island—the site of Westminster Abbey, whose name has now usurped its place. This last eyot, as Mr. Isaac Taylor notes, was enclosed by an arm of the Thames, part of whose bed is now occupied by the ornamental water in St. James's Park.

Northward, again, lie the St. Katherine's Docks, the most purely artificial of all the London docks, formed by excavating the site of the old St. Katherine's Priory, and carting away the soil to fill up the hollow of the Westminster arm of the river near what is now Belgrave Square. Seldom has the hand of man produced more profound changes in the natural aspect of any stretch of land, indeed, than has been the case in the wide alluvial levels of the greater London. Here, an embankment has shut out the tidal river; there, a sluice has drained some branching backwater; yonder, again, a low valley has been raised by the deposition of soil removed by tunnelling or excavating elsewhere. The changes which we ourselves have seen taking place in the Victoria Embankment, the Holborn Viaduct, the Docks, and the new parts of Westminster, are only the last chapters in a great continuous process, begun by Celt or Roman, and never ceasing up to our own time, whereby the general level of the entire metropolitan area has been gradually raised and equalised, through the combined action of natural causes and artificial engineering works.

On our right the white turrets of the Tower cap the half-artificial mound that rises boldly above the forest of masts, and forms the furthest outpost of the dry land that projected of old into the shallow expanse of the tidal mere formed by the throwing back of the waters of the Thames and Lea. We have now reached the very truest and most original London of all, the Celtic *dun* and Roman city that stretched from this point to the dip of Ludgate, and whose three highest points are visible even now from the waterside, crowned by the three landmarks of the Tower, the Cornhill Churches, and the dome of St. Paul's. Though the rise of the *dun* is hardly noticeable from any other place (save from the dome of Paul's itself), it

can still be seen distinctly from the deck of a Thames steamer; the high ground lifting itself at Tower Hill from the Wapping levels, continuing past the obliterated gap of the Wallbrook to St. Paul's, and dying down again at the foot of Ludgate Hill, where the commencement of the great stone embankment marks the old alluvial reaches of the Strand and the Fleet River. This is the original London that the trade of Thames created; and this is the uppermost reach of the navigable Thames which created it. In front of us lie the massive piers and living moving stream of London Bridge; and at London Bridge the pilgrimage of the *Puffin* will be fairly ended.

We cruise on slowly past the "Towers of Julius, London's lasting shame" (of course they have really no more to do with Caius Julius Cæsar than with the man in the moon), and abreast of the Custom House, and along as far as the odorous river-front of fishy Billingsgate. Somebody who was once brave enough to taste a mouthful of Thames water at this point survived long enough to state that it was brackish, and the truth has been accepted ever since on that traditional authority without further personal inquiry by later arrivals. To the south lies Southwark, whose very name of the South Work or embankment bears witness to its origin from the Roman enclosure of the tidal lagoon. A Roman bridge doubtless connected this southern suburb with London town; and in taking up the old English bridge a series of Roman coins were found underneath, ranging from a very early date down to the reign of Honorius. From that day to this some bridge or other has here spanned the Thames from time to time, and checked the further progress of ocean-going vessels up its stream. Sometimes picturesquely encumbered with quaint old-fashioned houses, then cleared and widened to larger dimensions, finally reconstructed of solid Dartmoor granite, from the weathered summit of Hey Tor, it has barred the way to ocean-going vessels with its perpetual notice of "No Thoroughfare" imprinted legibly upon its very piers. The little *Puffin* could easily make her way past the artificial barrier, to be sure, but her task is well finished, her work is done, and as she comes to rest by London Bridge Pier, we leap ashore, three brown sailor folk, to change our habiliments for the ordinary dress of the nineteenth-century Englishman, and dine on dry

land in solemn guise for the first time for three long weeks of glorious autumn weather.

So now our pleasant pilgrimage is ended, and the crew of the *Puffin* disperses itself its several ways, to return to the dull colourless routine of everyday work. We have followed the great river from its wide open seaward mouth, through its narrowing funnel portals, to its maritime *cul-de-sac* at London Bridge. We have coasted past the high chalk-downs of Kent, round the white cliffs of the nearer foreland, along the bold front of no longer insular Thanet, past the oyster banks of Whitstable and the high mud bluffs of Sheppey, to the Nore lightship and the broad estuary of the tributary Medway. We have sailed across the wide stretch of sea where the Thames water sweeps northward again to the German Ocean, and have visited the first thriving fishing villages and harbours of the East Anglian shore. We have coasted past the vast tidal flats of the Crouch and the Blackwater, and have made our way among the trackless creeks where the wild-fowl and the sea-swallows alone diversify the monotonous expanse of thrift and scurvy-grass with their snow-white wings. From these dreary and lonely back-currents of the mercantile highway we have turned at last into the full flood of modern seafaring life at the Nore, and have thence followed the ever-narrowing stream of varied shipping, past gloomy Gravesend, and lordly Greenwich, and bellicose Woolwich, and the sordid London slums to the Bridge itself. And in every part we have found it—not beautiful, for that the Lower Thames rarely is, but sometimes weird, sometimes grandiose, sometimes mysterious, sometimes picturesque, sometimes haggard, sometimes terrible, and sometimes dimly and mistily poetical. It is the glory of the Tidal Thames to be itself. Never for one moment does it feebly aim at being something other. If it did, it would fail egregiously. It cannot compare in natural scenery, even among great navigable rivers, with the Palisades and Highlands of the Hudson, with the Rapids of the St. Lawrence, with the tangled tropical beauty of the Mississippi, with the rocky hills and green sloping banks of the Lower Clyde. Of English tidal streams themselves, it is infinitely less romantic than the Bristol Avon, less pretty than the wooded Dart, less wild than the deep-gorged Tyne, less beautiful than the rocky many-branched Tamar. Even the tiny Fal far

surpasses it in native advantages of situation and surroundings. But the Thames makes up for all this, in its own majestic muddy way, by its marvellous human additions and marine accompaniments. Rising in the rockier secondary half of England, and flowing down from the central watershed, in the direction of the prevalent south-eastward tilt, towards the lowest and flattest portion of the dreary eastern tertiary levels, it loses itself at last in the sea among interminable labyrinths of marshes, mud-flats, and shifting sandbanks. Yet in so doing it sets before us in naked grandeur the very ideal and quintessence of a tidal river. Depending entirely for pictorial interest on its ships, its steamers, its lighthouses, its buoys, its beacons, its fishermen, its sailors, its quays, its piers, its long-shore folk, and its living restless variety; it presents us, so to speak, with all the skeleton elements of marine picturesqueness at one batch, unencumbered by the casual accessories of landscape background, or the too obtrusive reminders of rocks and trees and solid land. Fitly to interpret to the minds and eyes of Englishmen this most central and essential fact in our national existence, this prime highway of our commercial greatness, this ultimate origin of our naval supremacy, would surely be no small achievement for any artist of sea-loving British blood to undertake. Whoever would succeed in this arduous endeavour must catch and fix on his canvas or his paper, in plain black and white or in vivid colours, the very inmost spirit and deepest poetry of this our great, wonderful, bustling, grimy, majestic, opulent, squalid English Thames. To the hand that limns (which many have) he must join the eye that sees and the mind that interprets, which are not equally given to all whose outward vision beholds the shifting panorama of the mighty river. And with the rare gifts thus vouchsafed him by kindly Nature, he must deftly set before us in long procession the encircling sandbanks and misty inlets of the tawny sail-bespattered Tidal Thames. Does any such artist live amongst us now? My collaborator in this work will not permit me to answer that question in the affirmative here.

Before I discard my jersey and my rough woollen cap, however, for the more civilised costume of every-day life, I should like, in justice to myself, to state that my part of this joint production was written and finished some eight or nine years ago. The necessity for revising and submitting to

the engraver or the process-printer his sketches for the volume delayed my fellow-worker's portion of our joint task far longer than I had at all at first anticipated. Meanwhile the rest of the world had found out how admirable an artist my companion was; so that a great deal of what I have said here reads at present like a prophecy after the event. I have allowed it all to stand, however, just as I originally wrote it, because I felt it at the time, and because I had rather the world read it in its first form than that I should attempt to trim it down in accordance with the event, now that everyone recognises the skill and power which only a special few had then fully appreciated. And so, with a final farewell, we pull up below bridge, and our pleasant cruise is added to the ever-lengthening list of the things that have been and never again will be.

LONDON BRIDGE.

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